PARTISAN!

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Where is the World October?

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About Partisan:

Partisan is the official publication of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (RCO). We are a monthly journal of the 'partyist left' in Australia, and an organ of independent, communist journalism.

Alongside the RCO, we fight for a reunification of the left into a party that can carry out the tasks of the communist and workers movement: the establishment of a democratic republic and the dissolution of the capitalist prison-states. ■

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Who is the "RCO"?

The Revolutionary Communist Organisation (RCO) is a pre-party formation that works towards the re-unification of the socialist left in Australia into a single, mass communist party. We come from diverse political backgrounds and schools of Marxist thought, yet we are united by a common program.

We welcome rigorous debate and disagreement and are open to factions, yet act as one organisation. We are guided by the principle of diversity of thought, and unity of action. The capitalist mode of production is at the root of every social, environmental, and economic crisis today.

We fight for the liberation of queer people, Aboriginal people, and women, a liberation which can only be achieved through the destruction of the capitalist system. We are united by our determination to fight the capitalist mode of production at every turn, and our total commitment to its abolition. We are communists, unapologetically and without reservation.

We engage in every form of proletarian activity, whether protests or union drives, yet do not trail social movements; we aim in every instance to build the base for a mass workers' party, necessary to intervene in the class struggle and advance the communist movement. ■

PARTYISM: That section of the communist movement which sees the re-unification of communist forces into a single party representative of the movement as its primary task.

We do not reject the rest of the left - instead, we aim to work through the existing left to build a communist party. Such a party is united by a shared Marxist program, that is, a program for leading the working class to power and overthrowing the capitalist system.

For this reason, we eschew the malignant sect labels which are often thrown around amongst the left. We view all communist organisations as being "sects" - factional organisations which recruit to a particular tendency and viewpoint, as opposed to a Marxist program.

We aim to unite the sects into a party, being an organisation representative of the movement as a whole, and the political weapon of the working class. ■

Where is the World October?

October-November marks the passing of another anniversary of the October Socialist Revolution, which swept the working class to power in Russia over one hundred years ago. As the shots rung out at the Winter Palace and the guns of the *Aurora* thundered overhead, the workers and peasants of Russia began a cycle of revolutions and counter-revolutions that would not end until the latter part of the 20th Century. Their revolution did not just herald a change in government in Russia. It heralded the epoch of world revolution, which threatened to sweep aside the entire bourgeois world and herald the universal brotherhood of man. This long war of position and maneuver ended in the 1990s, when the Soviet Union, that great monolith that represented all the hope and tragedy, fidelity and treason of our epoch, collapsed into oligarchy and despotism.

Since then, we have lingered on in an endless twilight. The locomotive of historical development, that motor of progress, had been derailed, and the following decades saw the hegemony of liberal triumphalism, and a permanent counter-revolution in which the connection between the working class and socialism, the vehicle for all the hope of modernity, was severed. The working class has been universally placed on the retreat, and many of the traditions of organisation have been lost. We face a historical challenge greater than that faced by any previous generation of working class militants: to place history back on its tracks.

Today, we still live in the long shadow of the failure of the *World October*, the prophesied world revolution that our forebears believed would soon sweep capitalist civilisation, and all other forms of barbarism, into the trashheap of history. In this issue of *Partisan*, we look at the revolutions that have punctured the otherwise quiet years of capitalist triumph and examine them, in all their potential and their tragedy. We do this not just with the steady eye of the historian, but with the critical insight that only a commitment to human emancipation can provide.

Because history is being reborn. The colossus that is the International Proletariat is only just beginning to stir, and already the foundations of the earth are beginning to shake. Clarity is needed in the coming years if this struggle is to be won. We hope to contribute to a much needed clarification of tasks and perspectives.■

Forward to the World October

For the Editorial Committee

Edith Fischer

Soeara Merdeka, Victory to the Masses!

The Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation declares its unwavering support for the current upsurge of mass struggle gripping Indonesia. The butcher Prabowo is increasingly being left with no clothes as his bombastic calls for economic growth falls apart in the tempest of world politics. To the working masses taking to the streets to avenge the death of Affan Kurniawan, to denounce the corruption of the ruling political class, to struggle against the military's grasping hands into civilian politics, to fight for a better life, and a better world, we declare our unwavering solidarity. Against the government of the butcher, the government of incompetence and corruption, the government that denounces the working masses as "the stupidest people on earth" we declare our unwavering opposition. We declare our opposition as internationalists, and as proletarians and call for the victory of the toiling masses of Indonesia.

In the sixty years since the massacre of the Partai Komunis Indonesia the Indonesian state has integrated itself into the American imperialist block, buying into it with the corpses of communists, workers, and the people of East Timor, Aceh, and West Papua. Yet still when the Indonesian proletariat has arisen even in its weakened form it has sent crisis throughout the ruling classes. The fall of Suharto shows that the working masses of Indonesia hold in their hands the power to send their oppressors fleeing.

Yet unless the proletariat takes power into their own hands their tasks will remain unfinished. The imperialist exploitation of Indonesia will continue, the occupation of West Papua will continue, the standards of living will only decline, and the opportunity for the youth will only fade, women will remain oppressed, and children will be poisoned again. They cannot place any trust in the bourgeois; sections may claim that they want to help free Indonesia from imperialist oppression, Prabowo may claim to offer a solution but there is none within the imperialist world system. Nor is there any solution isolated, and without clarification.

The key task of Indonesian workers and communists at this current moment is to fight to secure the greatest possible gains for the working class and the communist movement possible. Communists cannot merely bombastically call for victory when it is impossible but must chart a course and struggle to win leadership to secure the greatest possible concessions with the forces available. A resignation of Prabowo, the dissolution of the House of Deputies, and the total repeal of all anti-communist laws would be major victories allowing the socialist movement to move forward into the light and air that it needs to thrive. The reforging of the Partai Komunis Indonesia would be a major victory, and the key task of the Indonesian communist movement is to cohere itself around a revolutionary internationalist program.

Communists must also fight against any attempts for reactionary forces to secure power. Against Islamism, nationalism, and reaction. Communists must wage a united struggle that seeks to split proletarian elements of the movement from the reactionary leadership.

As communists organising in Australia the RCO understands its task to fight against any attempts for the Australian state to intervene in Indonesia, and to provide political, and material solidarity to the struggle of the Indonesian masses. Communists must live up to the highest traditions of our movement and wage the struggle to help reforge the PKI, both in Indonesia and in Australia. Illegal and legal work must be combined in the highest traditions of Leninism, as part of the fight for workers' power.

The fight for the Indonesian revolution is the locus of the South-East Asian Revolution, any victory for the Australian proletariat can only come alongside the proletariat taking power across Asia and the Pacific. But the greatest struggle for the Indonesian revolution we can wage is to fight for revolution here. Any attempts to provide political, military, or economic support to the Indonesian regime we must oppose. Not a single gun, man, dollar, or ship for the butcher of the Indonesian proletariat. Not a single concession to bourgeois law. The highest tradition of the communist movement places the world revolution, and the advancement of the proletariat above any laws or fiction of bourgeois legality.

Against Australian chauvinism we declare

that the main enemy is at home. Against 'little Australia' parochialism throughout the socialist movement we declare ourselves for internationalism. Against nationalist sectarianism we proclaim ourselves for internationalist unity, and the maximal level of joint struggle to build the power of the Indonesian revolution.

Bubarkan DPR!
Papua Merdeka!
Reforge the PKI!
For democracy, bread, and socialism!
For a Workers' Republic in Indonesia and Australia!
Para Buruh Seluruh Dunia, Bersatulah! ■

CC statement on the 'Pukpuk' treaty

The announcement of the intent of the Australian and Papuan governments to sign the Pukpuk treaty must be understood within the context of Australia's historic engagement with Papua New Guinea (PNG) and current global inter-imperialist tensions. The announcement of the treaty, in a deeply ironic turn of events, came on the 50th anniversary of the independence of Papua New Guinea from Australian colonisation.

While, on the face of it, the treaty merely establishes a mutual defence pact between PNG and Australia - looking beneath the surface reveals a more cynical development. It includes allowing the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to recruit from Papua New Guinea, and the de facto incorporation of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) into the ADF. Historically, Australia's strategic outlook towards PNG has seen it as a barrier against military aggression from the north, as well as an arena for the destructive extraction of tin, gas, and other key resources.

The treaty also falls within Australia's recent 'muscling up' towards Pacific nations under both the Morrison and Albanese governments. The treaties with Nauru and Tuvalu, the stalled Nakamal agreement with Vanuatu, and ongoing talks with Fiji are all part of the same ongoing process in Pacific politics. Australia and New Zealand have a vested interest in controlling the sea lanes across the South Pacific, because they provide connection with the United States and form part of the broader global context of the American bloc aligning towards war with China. By granting Australia military access to PNG, the Pukpuk treaty ensures that Australia's strategic depth is pushed several thousand kilometres north. Furthermore, it provides the constantly undermanned ADF access to a new pool of recruits. To these recruits, the promise of an Australian citizenship and a high paying job offers a way out of the desperate and grinding poverty in PNG.

At the same time, the treaty hypothetically imposes Australian NATO armaments standards on the PNGDF. This creates a massive financial burden for the impoverished and underdeveloped state. Access to high-quality firearms is hardly an encouraging development in the context of PNG's longstanding issues of rural tribal violence. Indeed, factions of the PNG bourgeois have denounced the treaty on these grounds, reflecting the divisions within peripheral states - that will only deepen as the march towards war with China develops.

The Pukpuk treaty is just the latest form of the long running struggle between China and the American bloc for influence over the Pacific. China's increased investment in the development of infrastructure, policing, and governmental efficiency across the region since 2018 has been met with a counter-flurry of Australian-New Zealand-American investment. This tug-of-war is beginning to pay off for the west, as the un-democratic governments of the Pacific are turning towards the US.

Politics in Papua New Guinea are based in varying elite cliques squabbling for control of the national economic pie; not genuine clashes between the exploited and the bourgeois. Any attempt to rely upon these national elites as a 'revolutionary force' is practically impossible.

The fight for genuine freedom and democracy in Papua New Guinea cannot be separated from the fight for liberation from Australian imperialism or the fight for workers' power. The strategy of the proletariat in Papua must be to fight to dissolve Pukpuk, abolish the colonial monarchy, and fight for genuine social development. None of these are possible without the establishment of a workers' and peasants' government in alliance with the international working class.

As Communists organising in Australia, we must understand our tasks in relation to this struggle. So we stand for the establishment of a workers' republic in Australia - one that builds international solidarity across the Pacific.■

Mountains out of molehills

As unity talks between the RCO and the Spartacist League continues, ***Mila Volkova*** *responds to 'The Road to Party' by asking what – if anything – does the Spartacist League seriously disagree with the RCO on.*

"You yourself know the difference between a sect movement and a class movement from personal experience. The sect seeks its raison d'être and its point d'honneur not in what it has in common with the class movement, but in the particular shibboleth distinguishing it from that movement."

Marx to Schweitzer, 13 October 1868

In the Spartacist League of Australia's (SL/A) most recent reply to Anthony of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (RCO), The Road to Party, they made three major criticisms of the RCO:

- Our statement defending the CFMEU from federal administration was off the mark and we don't do enough to criticise the labour bureaucracy.
- Our line during the 2025 federal election, that socialists should vote for socialist candidates where they stood and Labor where they did not, was soft on the labour bureaucracy.
- Our program is a combination of surface-level 'ra-ra-revolutionary' rhetoric and a "lowest-common denominator".

These are the significant differences between the RCO and the SL/A that they believe must be clarified and fought over in the ongoing unity process. But these supposed differences are completely mystifying. The SL/A is making mountains of molehills with these critiques.

The critique of our statement on the federal government's forced administration of the CFMEU claims that we were too soft on the union bureaucracy. The SL/A's critique attempts to distort reality rather than confront it. Yes, the criminality of the Victorian branch and the connection with Croatian fascists was used as an excuse by the federal government, whose only intentions were to smash workers militancy and advance 'productivity' in the construction sector. These accusations are nonetheless true! Fascist thugs and misogynists should be ruthlessly opposed by socialists in the trade unions.

The SL/A seems to acknowledge the complicity of the union bureaucracy in general when it comes to the ACTU, who really are enemy agents inside of our camp. But the complicity of the Victorian branch of the CFMEU with fascism cannot be separated from this – both are forms of scabbing on the working class, and they feed into one another.

I am sure SL/A comrades agree with this, but this fact cannot be dismissed just by not mentioning it in a statement by a socialist sect, it must be openly fought, and the RCO was right to do so. The SL/A and the RCO completely agree on the need for militant rank-and-file union democracy, agitation for socialist politics in the unions, and for opposition to corruption, fascism, and class collaboration in union leadership. So why make such an attack out of something we agree on?

The SL/A's claim that the RCO did not make a call for an alternative during the federal election is also bizarre. We called for socialists to vote for socialist candidates wherever they stood. In an election with compulsory voting, there is no alternative to tactically voting against the Liberals wherever there is no socialist candidate. Does the SL/A advocate abstentionism or vote spoiling?

The SL/A and RCO agree on the need for a mass communist party that uses elections as an agitational tool. So, what does this purely negative critique of the RCO aim at? It is unclear. This "prolier than thou" posturing gets us nowhere.

What to make of the claim that the RCO has a "lowest common denominator program"? Who knows. The minimum element of the RCO's draft program alone is more comprehensive and revolutionary in its demands than any other socialist group in Australia, including the ICL's The Breakdown of US Hegemony and the Struggle for Workers' Power. I do not say this to score points, but to point out the SL/A's confusion towards us. If

they wanted to critique the RCO draft program for being idealist compared to a transitional program, that would at least be based in a substantive political disagreement. But the RCO's program is, definitively, more ambitious than the SL/A's. Does the SL/A think the program is a compromise with our least-revolutionary elements? The RCO practices majoritarian democracy internally, not consensus.

I cannot help but get the impression that the SL/A is quite confused. These disagreements are broken records of outdated sect squabbles. The SL/A must open its eyes to the actual differences between us here in the 21st century. Our program is not the program of the German Social Democratic Party which Trotsky criticised in the 30s. We are not tailing Labor and the union bureaucracy, as the official European Marxist-Leninist parties did.

The same goes for the SL/A's exclusive focus on challenging the reformist leadership of the working class in the trade unions and the Labor party. This itself is also not a large disagreement between us, we agree totally with the SL/A's argument that:

Like the RCO, we think that in this context it is of especial importance to engage with and cohere as many forces on the left as possible on a revolutionary basis. That struggle can only be waged in opposition to the Laborite obstacles standing in its way [...] Yes, we need a communist party to split the class, but this party can only be built on the basis of fighting for this split. -Road to Party

Where our two organisations do disagree is on what the immediate tasks of socialists in Australia are. Without a doubt, we must challenge Labor, and SL/A comrades would no doubt continue their work on this front once unity with the RCO is achieved. However, the claim that this is our primary task in the coming years is wrongheaded. Trotsky was correct to argue for a focused attack on the reformist leadership of the mass workers' parties and unions in the 1930s and 1940s. But this was in the context of a consistent and militant mass workers' struggle. This is not the situation we find ourselves in today, and a strategy that assumes that we are would be a mistake. Our reformist class leadership is more an effect of a weak working class than a cause of that weakness.

The Question of "Leadership"

Comrades in the SL/A beat the dead horse of class leadership for an understandable reason – to avoid the mechanistic trap of Marxism-Leninism, which claims that all advances and retreats are the result of large-scale social conditions which socialist militants are unable to meaningfully affect.

But the over-emphasis on class "leadership" in the 21st century makes an error of its own. Absent the context of the mid-20th century, declaring that "leadership" is the primary issue assumes that the working class is an active, but misled, force in society. This error misreads our reality where the class is politically passive, weak, and disorganised. Misreading results in mispractice. The SL/A acts as if class struggle is a contest between small, hardened groups on the left and the right. But the working class is not ground to be taken by formations on the battlefield.

The reformist leadership of the class reflects the working class's reformist ideology. This ideology is not just a Machiavellian scheme imposed on it by the bourgeoisie. The combined and uneven development of capital accumulation and commodity fetishism results in economistic and social chauvinistic ideologies emerging spontaneously from the class. These are embodied and reproduced by material practice and rituals of working-class life: the relative privilege of the labour aristocracy, the ghettoisation of migrants and non-white workers, the subjugation of women workers to patriarchal reproduction, and so on. These are all spontaneous processes necessary to the reproduction and valorisation of capitalist social relations. They are not imposed from outside.

But these processes can be contested! The SL/A strategy acts as if, were we to displace the workers' reformist leadership, class struggle would bloom across the country like the sunrise on the morning after. The ideologies that arise from these practices and rituals can only be attacked by replacing those practices. This is the purpose of the theoretical education of the masses, mass trade union activity, the daily struggle with the bosses, and workers' social clubs.

It is only possible for collaborators with the boss to lead the working class because backwards, bourgeois practices and rituals dominate the class. They have dominated the Australian working class consistently for its entire history, but especially so for the last three decades. The problem with the SL/A's strategy is not that we should not struggle against reformist leaders, indeed we must, but that it neglects the greater task of socialist ideological struggle and working-class re-composition.

Thus, we can have a dialectical theory of the relationship between objective and subjective

conditions that avoids the mechanistic trap. When pointing to the failures of the Australian workers' movements since World War Two, we must acknowledge that racism and economism are results of objectives tendencies and pressures. We can also recognise that these pressures were able to be fought directly by socialist militants through mass ideological education, but also through working class struggle which can alter those objective conditions.

This is a small and incomplete accounting of the 60s – 80s in Australia: working class militancy was on the rise not because white workers demanded higher wages for themselves, but because they made common cause with the disabled, mothers, indigenous, and migrants to directly attack the material conditions that divided them. However, socialists were unable to turn this trend into a revolutionary movement because the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) abstained from consistent, patient, and public ideological education (due to its tailist relationship with Laborism). Though the Accords certainly had something to do with Labor's leadership of the class; it had just as much to do with the objective pressures of globalisation, offshoring, and the ideology of economism native to the Australian workers' movement – subjective and objective conditions combined.

Though the disunity of the socialist movement into useless sects is, to some extent, a product of the objective process of de-industrialisation, it is also a result of subjective conditions. After the correct decision by communists to split from the 2nd International, our movement learned the (wrong) lesson that splitting is the correct response to opportunism. We became addicted to unprincipled splits and expulsions. This was not helped by the denouncement culture of Red Guard-ism that predominated the 60s. Let's not forget that the smashing of the CPA-led NSW branch of the Builders' Labourer's Federation was orchestrated by a member of the CPA-ML, a split which, like many others, only took place because of the total lack of democracy in the official Marxist-Leninist parties. In many ways, we are our own worst enemies, and it is wrong to blame our disunity on the bourgeoisie.

We need more productive disagreements

The question of leadership is probably linked with the SL/A's history of sectarianism which it is now in the process of abandoning. It makes sense to be staunchly sectarian if the primary failure of the socialist movement is not having the correct line to oppose the reformists with. But this is not our primary obstacle. The problem is that we do not have a consistent sphere of working-class life in which to spread revolutionary ideology at all. The SL/A acknowledged this somewhat in The Crisis in the Marxist Left and the Tasks of the ICL and The Roots of The ISA Crisis, but this is not reflected in their orientation towards exclusively challenging Labor's leadership. I would put it to comrades of the SL/A to consider who they are reaching with their dramatic slogans and denouncements of Labor. Is it the working class? Is it the minority of workers who attend Labor branch meetings? Is it other members of the labour bureaucracy?

Once again, I am left confused. We agree on the need to cohere and regroup socialist forces. We agree that this can only happen on the basis of opposition to reformism and social chauvinism. We agree on the need for a revolutionary socialist candidate in every electorate. We agree on the need for open democracy and factionalism within socialist groups. Though the SL/A is currently oriented exclusively towards work inside Labor, they have never claimed that RCO comrades should stop our work outside of Labor once we are unified (in fact, the small success of our work here seems to be part of the reason the SL/A even proposed unity); so we also seem to agree that it shouldn't be our exclusive focus! What exactly do we disagree on?

It is good to see that the SL/A is struggling against their sectarian past. Perhaps the slow coming-to-terms-with this past and realignment is why these criticisms seem confused and half-hearted. But this finger-pointing ultra posturing must be completely abandoned if unity between our organisations is to be productive. Principled, democratic unity ensures the most effective strategy emerges over time, and it raises the quality of all theoretical, strategic, and tactical disagreement. But this is only possible if those involved are clear-eyed, rather than re-enacting old battles. The 'ra-ra-revolutionary' sloganeering of the SL/A has a place in the struggle, and the rhetoric is certainly impressive, but it is assuredly unsuited to our current moment. We need patience, open-mindedness, self-critique, and unity. We need all of that so we can begin the slow work of raising the consciousness of other workers. We cannot do any of that while chasing old phantoms. ■

Why we are launching Labor Tribune

*Editorial statement by the **Labor Tribune group**, on the relaunching of Labor Tribune (labortribune.net.au).*

With a world in crisis, the left is struggling to rethink how to engage in mass politics that are true to the radical traditions of Marxism. Labor Tribune aims to contribute to a renaissance.

It seems there has never been a greater disparity between the need to radically change society and the capacity of the workers' movement to do so.

To achieve real social change, the working class needs a political party armed with a democratic program that lays out the strategic road to socialism, in Australia and internationally.

Faced with this task, however, socialists today have difficulty uniting, thinking critically and pursuing the collective work of getting that job under way.

Labor Tribune aims to be a forum to support that shared work.

Since the slow collapse of the Communist Party in Australia reached its miserable end in 1991, the radical left has seemed scattered into disparate tribes speaking different languages, repeating errors of the last century over and again. What was then tragedy has become farce.

A culture of unity seems beyond the fragments of the Marxist left. Yet this is what is needed as part of a general fightback against the rapaciousness of unfettered capitalism.

Socialism – the positive transformation of capitalist society – can only be the conscious and democratic act of the working class, the vast majority of global society. Capitalism won't end spontaneously, except negatively, through war, environmental catastrophe and barbarism.

Where the left does seek to become relevant to masses of people, it mostly does so on a reformist agenda far below what is needed to achieve radical change.

Genuine debate, unity in action

Left groups often focus narrowly on recruiting to their ranks: every cause is measured by how 'recruitable' it is. Real and important differences in doctrine and tradition between organisations and trends calls for genuine and open debate. Where differences are acknowledged, they are more often dealt with in a sterile, diplomatic and formulaic manner. Mostly, though, differences are buried as embarrassing squabbles, not to be had 'in front of the children': a false unity at the lowest common denominator is preached.

Yet, to become the ruling class of a socialist society, the working class needs a culture of democracy and openness, where differences can be debated and discussed in the open and unity in action achieved at the highest possible level.

With a world in crisis, the left is struggling to rethink how to engage in mass politics that are true to the radical and democratic traditions of Marxism. Labor Tribune aims to contribute to a renaissance in the way the left collectively thinks, debates and organises.

Marxism is not about delivering the 'truth' as Holy scripture to the working class, it is a social science, a methodology and a weapon for the working class to grab hold of and learn in order to make itself into a ruling class and sweep capitalism aside.

The absence of a radical organised left and the victories of neoliberal capitalism since the 1980s have seen the ALP become ever more open in its championing of capitalism and nationalism. In Australia, this has reached an apogee where the titular head of the ALP 'left' is now a prime minister who embraces a military alliance with the United States to prop up its fading empire.

This side of the workers' movement, the 'coalitionist' wing that seeks compromise with

Hamish McPherson delivers the Commonwealth Affairs and Foreign Relations report at the 2025 Vic ALP state conference.

the system, is more powerful than ever before and in full embrace of collaboration with the capitalist class, hoping to achieve crumbs from the table.

Much of the far left, on the other hand, forlornly hopes that the working class will arise spontaneously through a 'streets and strikes' strategy that has proven in practice to be illusionary.

Political leadership, mass organisation and a political program are absent.

What happened to Pax Americana?

The global withering of the workers' and socialist movements over the past 40 years has left the planet open to the largely unrestricted greed of the capitalist system and its ruling classes.

The Soviet Union was a living example of what goes wrong when a workers' revolution is isolated in a backward country and fails to transform the most advanced economies. The USSR became its opposite – a testament to the fact that without democracy and internationalism, socialism is not sustainable.

The anti-democratic 'emergency measures' taken to try to save that revolution were turned into organisational principles by most of the left, ensuring we lost the fight for democracy again and again.

Yet the collapse of the Soviet Union was meant to herald a Pax Americana, a peace dividend and the final triumph of liberal capitalism. That was all buried in the bloodied sands of Iraq in 2003, when the USA, UK, Australia and others invaded based on invented 'intelligence evidence' of weapons of mass destruction that simply didn't exist.

Since then, we have seen an explosion in inequality, an environmental catastrophe unfolding before us and the world inching closer to wars that could trigger a nuclear exchange, obliterating modern civilisation.

This has not gone uncontested. As Vincent Bevins noted in his book If We Burn, the decade up to 2020 saw more people mobilised in mass demonstration than perhaps in all human history. From the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 up to the COVID pandemic, millions of people took to the streets as part of the Arab Spring, as part of the Occupy movement, on the streets of Chile and South Korea, in Hong Kong and Brazil.

Yet Bevins says that while the 2010s was the 'Mass Protest Decade' it was also the decade of the 'Missing Revolution'.

In an interview with Jewish Currents, Bevins said that if you contest power, you better be prepared to take it because "a counterrevolution always comes". And he argues the radical left and workers' movements globally were not prepared to take power out of the hands of the oligarchs and warmongers.

'At the beginning of the 2010s, a lot of people had the assumption that if they raised enough awareness, if they proved very clearly that they were right, and if the people were on their side, then the people in power would have to respond positively. And that's just simply not true, especially when you're dealing with geopolitics.'

Vincent Bevins

Protest is not enough. Politics is key.

We are learning this over again in the protests against the genocide in Gaza. On the coalitionist wing of the Palestine solidarity movement, there is a touching faith in international law and a vain hope that the UN can deliver a two-states solution.

Much of the far left seems to think that by holding ever larger demonstrations, this will trigger a radical transformation leading to a break from imperialism and Zionism.

Both strategies are dead ends, not just for Gaza, but for the workers' movement in general.

Rebuilding strategy, rebuilding memory

It is, unfortunately, as if the working class has lost its memory. And in a sense, it has. The role played by the communist parties in countries like Australia was to act as the memory and collective organiser of the most militant and far-sighted parts of the working class.

While the communist movement had faded into a left reformist shell of its former potential, it still organised the most militant workers and kept the memory and hope of a better society alive.

Labor Tribune aims to contribute to the

formation of an authoritative political centre that can rebuild a revolutionary strategy for the working-class movement, with militant opposition to the monarchist constitutional order at its centre.

This is no mere academic exercise. While the working class needs Marxism, it is equally true that Marxism needs the working class.

German social democratic leader, Karl Kautsky, said one of the great historical achievements of Karl Marx was the merger of the labour movement with socialism.

Until that unity is once again achieved, socialism cannot become a material force.

Why are you in the Labor Party?

The project to rebuild a mass Marxist left in this country will need to involve political struggle in the existing organisations of the working class; that includes the trade unions and the Labor Party as well as the groups of the socialist left.

We publish in our first edition of Labor Tribune a letter from the Communist International to the Communist Party of Australia from 1922. It urges the new CPA to work with the ALP, even though it was an openly racist and pro-Empire party. This was not in pursuit of a peace agreement, but to "unmask the opportunist leaders of the Labor Party".

While a century has passed, it is *still* relevant for Marxists in Australia to organise in the Labor Party, in the unions and to seek joint work towards organisational unity with socialists across the labour movement.

To help achieve that, Labor Tribune will facilitate debate and support socialist organisation across the movement. Most of us are in the ALP, not because we harbour illusions that in its current form the ALP can lead the working class to socialism, but because a mass working class party dedicated to the revolutionary transformation of society will need, in part, to go through the existing organisations of the working class.

The Australian Labor Party is and has always been a *capitalist or bourgeois workers' party*. It also represents an echo of working-class consciousness – the need for the workers to organise. The ALP seeks reforms that protect and benefit the working class in Australia, but it does so strictly within and is moulded by Australian capitalism's priorities and its social, political and parliamentary framework.

In its rules, the ALP describes itself as a 'democratic socialist party' and has as its *first objective* the socialisation of means of production, distribution and exchange (with Cold War-era provisos introduced in the early 1950s). This means the Labor Party is a strange beast – a contradiction born of the needs of the working class to organise but dominated by the ideology of the capitalist class.

This makes it an important area of struggle. While the mass of the working class presently has no vision of a socialist future, it seeks a better life within capitalism through the ALP. To the extent the working class mobilises for socialism, this will in part manifest within the ALP.

That is why for Marxists, working in a liberal-bourgeois workers' party is as relevant as working in the trade unions or working in the broader movement as part of our fight for a workers' party that is organised around a revolutionary and democratic program.

Marxists, communists and socialists should seek to shape the political nature of the ALP's left wing – from within and without – and not just leave it to spontaneous formation. We fight for the ALP to be an open, democratic united front of the working class where socialists and communists can openly argue for their politics.

Our aim is to overturn the current 'commonsense' of Laborism, which seeks reforms while maintaining capitalism, with a new commonsense of Marxism, championing the working class to embrace democratic republicanism and socialism.

As we state in our founding 'About Us' statement:

- The ALP is a contradictory class formation. While it has never been socialist, it is a party based on the organised labour movement but with a parliamentary and union leadership that pursue pro-capitalist politics.
- The role of Marxists is to overcome the central contradiction of Laborism positively by building a political centre in the labour movement that not only analyses the world but attempts to change it. Marxists campaign for working-class socialist politics in all areas of the labour movement and society.
- The ALP is riven with factionalism. However, with the demise of the Cold War and the collapse of the Communist Party, ideological divisions between left and right have effectively disappeared. The factions now operate mainly as machinery to divide power and jobs between career aspirants.

We look forward to working with all those in the ALP and the broader workers' movement who share our vision for a world without war, without classes, without exploitation, without oppression, without environmental calamity. Just imagine what we can achieve together. ■

Revolution & Counterrevolution in Tonga

*Nineteen years ago, the Tongan capital descended into flames as pandemonium gripped the streets. Mainstream imperialist press peddles narratives of rampant youth gangs destroying peace and order. But under the surface, writes **Max J**, there was a heightening political struggle which is often overlooked.*

Rioters in Nuku'alofa, 2006. Photo: John Ewen / CC-BY-SA 2.5

The 2006 riot

The first riots started at 3pm on Thursday, November 16th. The first targets of the rioters were government buildings in the capital city of Nuku'alofa. Then, they moved on to buildings owned by government officials and foreign banks, in particular ANZ and Westpac. Police stood on the sides of streets and watched helplessly as the violence took place, or perhaps they weren't assed to stop it. At the Chinatown Hotel, a gang of youths arrive, followed by a quarry truck. Despite the pleas of the hotel's owners to spare the building, it too is soon torched with firebombs.

All sorts of people participated in the riots: the young, the elderly, men and women. But the more bombastic acts of violence – such as the firebombing, car tipping, the demolitions, were seemingly done primarily by younger men. By the end of the night, most of the capital city had been burnt to the ground. Tongan Police and military were scarcely able to retake control of the capital's CBD.

Earlier that day, a crowd of several thousand gathered in Nuku'alofa, near Tongan Parliament. The expectation of the crowd was that the nobles, who were guaranteed seats in Parliament, would support parliamentary and electoral reforms which would, among other things, increase the number of seats for people's representatives (MPs elected by commoners). This did not come to pass. Instead, Tonga's parliament (Fale Alea 'o Tonga) adjourned for the year. This angered the crowd. Armed with hammers, sticks, rocks and bricks, they vented their frustrations through the last means available to them: a riot.

On paper, Tonga had been a constitutional monarchy since 1875, when King George Tupou I adopted a modern constitution. Though Tonga had been unified as a single entity since 1845, it wasn't until the adoption of this constitution that Tonga became a 'modern' state. This constitution enshrined a parliamentary style of government that is similar to, but not exactly like, the 'Westminster system' developed in England.

This parliament held seats for hereditary nobles, as well as for representatives elected by commoners. While ostensibly upholding the principle of equal representation for nobles and commoners, as it often goes, the nobles and chiefs held most of the power in government. This is not to say that the nobles are, or were, necessarily a monolith, or that they voted as a bloc, since the nobles rarely formed a unified front of their own. But their class position granted them access to power and a proximity to the royal family that allowed them to politically outflank commoners, in parliament and beyond.

The Prime Minister and Cabinet were all appointed directly by the King. This was the case until 2014, when 'Akilisi Pohiva of the Human Rights & Democracy Movement (which had formed the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands by that time) was elected PM. The Human Rights & Democracy Movement (HRDM) is a liberal reformist movement, which aimed to reform the Tongan political system to squash corruption and adopt a more liberal-democratic structure which would strip the King of direct executive power.

The Human Rights and Democracy Movement

The HRDM was founded in the 1970s, first as an informal grouping of liberal and democratically minded politicians, lawyers and professionals in Tonga. It was formalised in

1992 as the 'Pro-Democracy Movement', and it fielded candidates for the 1999 election. The HRDM/PDM had a political orientation which was never fully coherent. Its members were broadly Christians and Liberal, but did not have a wholly unified view of what kind of democratic system would be best for Tonga. By the 1999 election, its members and leadership included Dr Sione 'Amanaki Havea (Wesleyan minister and developer of 'Pacific theology'), Rev. Simote Vea (Wesleyan minister), Fr. Selwyn 'Akau'ola (Roman-Catholic Priest and editor of the Tongan Catholic monthly Taumu'a Leilei), Prof. Futa Helu (founder of the liberal and independent 'Atenisi Institute—both a high school and university), 'Akilisi Pohiva (teacher, radio host, newsletter editor, and long-time democracy advocate), and many others.

While democratic pro-reform candidates won more seats than previously in the 1999 election, they received fewer votes. For example, in 1996, 'Akilisi Pohiva got 9,149 votes in Tongatapu 1, while in 1999, he got 8,556. Of the nine People's Representatives elected, five were pro-reform: 'Akilisi Pohiva, 'Uliti Uata (HRDM founder), Sunia Fili, Samiu Vaipulu, and 'Esau Namoa. Their success, despite their fewer votes, is attributed mainly to their style of campaigning. Unlike traditional elections for People's Representatives, the HRDM/PDM candidates campaigned as a bloc, running awareness campaigns in villages in electorates they intended to run in. However, it is important to note that People's Representatives, even the more ideologically vocal ones, are mostly elected based on personal factors (familial relationships, etc).

Class in Tonga

Much of the political struggle for democratic reforms is influenced and heightened by class in Tonga. Class stratification in Tonga, and indeed the entire Pacific region, is complex. In Tonga, this involves different forms of social divisions which often overlap, and sometimes contradict each other. There are clans (ha'a) which fall under chiefly titles and estates owned by chiefs and nobles (hou'eiki). Hou'eiki maintain power in Tongan society (past and present) through various means. Their power is consolidated socially through faka'apa'apa (deference/respect). On the one hand, it is a form of social cooperation between peoples that crosses classes. On the other, it is a form of feudal obligation between rulers and the ruled.

Like other indigenous peoples worldwide, Tongan culture has a complex system of kinship. Tongan kinship survived modernisation, though it has changed form over the centuries and decades since. Kinship establishes gender roles, patriarchal authority, and the transfer of property between generations. For example, in Tongan families, control over property is held by fathers and eldest male children/siblings. However, sisters have a higher 'rank' in the Tongan system of rank and power than brothers do. This contradicts the fact that the elder brother has more authority in the family/kāinga than the elder sister does. Despite their higher 'rank', sisters do not have authority over brothers. While both men and women are respected (faka'apa'apa), men are respected on the basis that they have power and authority, while women are respected on the basis that men have an obligation to care and provide for them.

This speaks nothing to the broader system of social class that developed both before and after capitalism took hold in the Pacific. Families do not tend to cross class lines. Families rarely if ever comprise both commoners and nobles. In the chiefly system, chiefs and nobles (the 'eiki) ruled over estates, which were territorial divisions including both entire islands, and sections of islands. This class of chiefs and nobles had ruled the islands that made up Tonga for thousands of years. In modern Tonga, the rule of the chiefs and nobles is less extreme, but nonetheless persists in spite of centuries of capitalist modernity.

Prelude and aftermath of the 2006 riot

Politically, Tonga is a strange country. It has an ostensibly democratic (and unicameral) parliament, though it wasn't until the 2010s that elections actually changed the composition of government. The HRDM campaigned strongly on government transparency, anti-corruption, limiting the power of the monarch, and liberal democratic reforms such as a separation of powers and 'rule of law'. In 2006, HRDM leaders urged and supported a street protest in Pangai Lahi. This protest was held on June 1st, when Tonga's parliament opened. This peaceful protest was suppressed by the Tongan state, which then launched fines and legal proceedings against its organisers ('Akilisi Pohiva, Teisina Fuko, and others), though many pleaded not guilty. If only the monarchist government had the gift of foresight — as the suppression of this peaceful protest only increased tensions which would boil over in November with the riots.

The aftermath of the riots in November

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SOLIDARITY DINNER

An evening to commemorate past international solidarity in Australia in support of national liberation struggles as well as advocate support for solidarity to free Palestine today. Australian trade unions, workers, youth and other common people campaigned seriously and enthusiastically in support of Indonesian Independence between 1945-49, and between 1965-76 in support of Vietnamese independence. This occurred again during the 1975-1998 period in support of East Timorese (Timor Leste's) liberation. Today the Palestine Solidarity movement is growing around the world, but much more is needed to break ties and defeat Israel. ■ **red-spark.org for more information.**

Save Our People in the Gaza Strip from the Israeli Genocide

With the continuation and intensification of Israel's ongoing military aggression against our Palestinian people, and the escalation of unprecedented and wide-ranging war crimes of genocide being carried out in the Gaza Strip for nearly two consecutive years — using all types of modern weaponry, including internationally prohibited weapons — alongside the imposition of a suffocating siege, deliberate starvation and thirst, and the denial of basic food, medicine, and all necessities of life, while relentlessly destroying homes, institutions, shelters, and infrastructure including water and electricity networks, erasing entire neighborhoods and cities from the map, and pursuing systematic ethnic cleansing and forced displacement:

This has so far resulted in the killing, injury, or disappearance of no fewer than 230,000 Palestinian civilians, while 2.1 million civilians suffer extreme hunger, as the entire Gaza Strip has been reduced to rubble.

Accordingly, the Palestinian People's Party once again issues this urgent call to all political parties, leftist and democratic social forces, parliaments, solidarity movements, defenders of freedom, justice, human rights, and international law, and to all free people of the world: to urgently intervene to compel the Israeli occupation government and its fascist system to immediately end the ongoing genocide against our people in Gaza, to save lives, and to turn expressions of sympathy and solidarity into real, political steps. This also requires translating the repeated international recognitions of the independent State of Palestine into concrete measures, through action on the following:

Expand and intensify all forms of popular and official protests against the comprehensive genocide, siege, and forced displacement imposed on our people, and exert maximum pressure on the U.S. administration and its allies to compel Israel to stop its bloody war, which relies on the latest American, European, and Israeli weaponry, some of which is internationally prohibited.

Impose a total ban on the supply of all types of weapons to Israel, and cancel all agreements in this regard, in response to its brutal and bloody use against unarmed civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in Gaza.

Boycott Israeli products and institutions across all sectors, end normalization, cut ties at every level and in all fields, halt investments in Israel, and impose sanctions on it.

Compel international bodies, especially the UN Security Council and General Assembly, to implement international law — foremost the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 in all occupied Palestinian territories — and to uphold the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, fulfilling their obligations under international law by taking serious and concrete measures to end Israel's occupation and to implement UN resolutions on Palestinian rights.

Demand that UN member states expel Israel from the United Nations and all its agencies and organizations, and work to isolate it as an occupying and terrorist power guilty of all forms of war crimes and genocide against humanity, while rejecting recognition of any changes it has imposed on the status of occupied Palestinian land.

Pursue and arrest Israeli war criminals to bring them before international courts for their war crimes and genocide against humanity, and take all necessary measures at every level to end Israel's and its leaders' ongoing impunity. ■ **Palestinian People's Party, 22 September 2025**

2006 saw the immediate launching of a state of emergency by the royalist government (headed rather reluctantly by Feleti 'Fred' Sevele, who had taken over as PM after the resignation of 'Ulukālala Lavaka Ata/future king Tupou VI) which lasted until the early 2010s. The state launched a legal assault against the democracy movement: democratic leaders such as 'Akilisi Pohiva and others were arrested and charged with sedition in 2007, though these charges did not stick, and Pohiva went on to successfully be elected to the electorate of Tongatapu in the 2008 election.

Almost immediately following the riots, pacific rim imperial forces from Australia and New Zealand entered Tonga — ostensibly to help the government 'restore order'. 110 soldiers, along with 44 police officers, arrived from AU/NZ to supplement the Tongan police and military (the Australian contingent was comprised of the 1st Battalion RAR). What followed was a little over a month of imperialist terror: both foreign and Tongan police and military rounded up hundreds of protestors and non-protestors alike. Soldiers assaulted everybody, young and old, for as little as drinking alcohol on the street. The imperialists withdrew their forces in December 2006, though the damage had already been done.

The 2008 election was an upswing for the democracy movement, which showed its resilience against the anti-democratic state of emergency. 'Akilisi Pohiva criticised the continuation of the state of emergency:

"*I don't see any reason for government to continue to hold on to the emergency power. There are a lot of allegations against the Prime Minister and some of the ministers. And I think the government, especially the Prime Minister and the Minister of Tourism, they are under threat and they still have to respond to so many allegations.*" (RNZ, 28 January 2008).

While the state of emergency persisted, in 2008 the democratic movement elected six representatives: four from the HRDM, and two from the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The PDP was formed in 2005, after its founding members were expelled from the HRDM/PDM over disputes around candidacies. It was established at a founding meeting at the 'Atenisi Institute, and included 'Atenisi founder Futa Helu. Police Minister Clive Edwards, long hated by the movement for his role in supporting the monarchist government in his capacity as police boss, was also a founding member of the PDP (known as the Tongan Democratic Party in 2005). The PDP was also the first registered political party in

Soldier stands guard beside journalist in the aftermath of November riot, 2006. Photo: John Ewen / CC-BY-SA 2.5

Tonga, since the HRDM was not a registered political party. The cracks were beginning to show in the 'pro-democracy movement', which was never a single unified force to begin with.

In 2010, democratic reforms were adopted. The number of People's Representatives was increased from nine to seventeen, giving commoners more representatives than nobles. There were now four political parties: the Democratic Party (founded by the HRDM/PDM), the People's Democratic Party (now defunct), the Sustainable Nation-Building Party (formed by Auckland-based lawyer Sione Fonua, now defunct), and the Tongan Democratic Labor Party (an attempt at a social democratic party, formed by members of the Public Services Association, seemingly defunct).

The 2010 election had mixed results for the democrats. While the Democratic Party earned less votes than its HRDM parent did in 2008 (partly due to the electoral reforms changing numbers, and new parties running after splits in the movement), it won more seats (as more seats were given to commoners). The People's Democratic Party, which won two seats in 2008, lost both of these in 2010. However, this election set the stage for the democratic party's historic win in 2014: when 'Akilisi Pohiva became the first commoner to be elected PM. Pohiva would govern as PM from 2014 until his death in 2019.

The often overlooked history of Tonga's democracy movement, as divided as it is, has many lessons for the international socialist movement. It shows that even in countries as deeply conservative as Tonga, there can, and does, exist a (at the very least liberal) reformist current willing to mobilise politically for changes to the system. But, crucially, we must recognise that liberal reformers cannot bring true democratic change, nor lead the workers and toilers to power.

The HRDM/PDM and DPFI (Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands) has waged an admirable struggle for democratic reform in Tonga. However, it has shown itself to be incapable of taking the big steps necessary to establishing a truly democratic system. Most importantly, it is a liberal-bourgeois movement influenced by Christian ministers and intellectuals, who have no interest in abolishing the monarchy or establishing a republic.

The events of 2006 were nothing short of an attempted revolution. It came after decades of political organising by the democratic movement, and historic strikes by public service workers in 2005. The events of November shook the royalists and the nobles to their core, and they worked hard to smash the commoners and restore order, with the backing of their pacific rim imperialist allies in Australia and NZ.

But peace and order are fleeting. It is more than possible for a revolutionary upsurge to take place a second time in Tonga. It leaves open the question of leadership, particularly, revolutionary leadership. Tonga lacks a socialist movement, though the attempt at a social democratic Labor Party may have laid the groundwork for one. With a suffocating political atmosphere marred by suppression and intimidation, it seems likely that the development of revolutionary socialist leadership for the Tongan workers and toilers must develop in exile – amongst the diaspora living in the pacific rim and beyond.

This movement cannot win power from the outside: it must carry out political awareness campaigns and organising drives inside of Tonga, to build the movement domestically. Tonga prides itself on being the last kingdom in the Pacific. With any luck, it may be able to pride itself on being the first democratic republic in the Pacific. ■

The Relevance of Trotskyism Today

Presentation by ***C. Bourchier*** *of the Spartacist League of Australia on the ongoing relevance of Trotskyism in the 21st century.*

Hello comrades,

It is a real pleasure to present today as a member of the SL/A, and hopefully soon, a member of the RCO. Believe it or not, I think the topic today is quite an important one. But why is this so? A lot of comrades are sceptical of these labels people slap on themselves. In some respects, this is completely understandable. You go online and a lot of these tendencies seem more like glorified fandoms stanning whatever historical figure. And supposed Trotskyists are no exception to this rule—ironic since Trotsky would have abhorred that, just as he abhorred the Stalinists turning Lenin from revolutionary leader into a pseudo-religious icon.

Much of this has been inflamed by the fact that a lot of the left differ by shades when it comes to their program today and as such substitute actual programmatic differences with bickering on whatever historical hot-takes. I mean I can ask anyone from the CPA to SAlt what they think about the leaders of the MUA and I promise you it would be hard to tell apart one from another. That's not to say that there aren't historical lessons of the past that are imperative to assimilate. But these are only useful insofar as they arm us to fight for revolution today. Which is what I'll be talking about.

I'm sure comrades have read the latest Partisan. One of the articles that really stuck out to me was Comrade Volkova's "Stalinism: Was there an alternative?" What a wonderful question!

But unfortunately, when reading through this article, the alternative sounds like something in the realm of, to use Volkova's words, an "alternative history" rather than anything real. Here lies the problem. There actually was an alternative. Not a theoretical one fit for some poorly made alt-history youtube video, but like a real alternative that drew in thousands of Bolsheviks around the world in a struggle for a revolutionary program—not in retrospect but at the time. I am of course referring to the struggle of the left opposition, who were denounced as "Trotskyists," a term that those who defend this tradition eventually appropriated for themselves.

As much as I could talk all day on the left opposition's struggle against Stalinism, I will keep it short. What I will say though is that Trotsky and the left opposition did not invent anything new. To quote James P. Cannon,

historic American Trotskyist leader, "Trotskyism is not a new movement, a new doctrine, but the restoration, the revival, of genuine Marxism as it was expounded and practised in the Russian revolution and in the early days of the Communist International." To put it simply, Trotskyism is not a bunch of new revelations with a bunch of new shibboleths which one can wave around to ward off Stalinism and rally the masses for world revolution—Trotskyism is revolutionary Marxism applied to new conditions and against new obstacles.

Even this wasn't something invented by the left opposition. Leninism itself was revolutionary Marxism revived and applied in the imperialist epoch. In the decades before WW1, imperialist powers came to ascendance, which allowed them to bribe an upper stratum of the working class and many of its leaders. When these opportunists showed their true colours, supporting their "own" bourgeoisie at the outbreak of WW1, Kautsky argued that this was inherent and inevitable given the development of events, concluding that we just had to wait things out until everyone comes to their senses and become true revolutionary Marxists again. In practice this meant conciliating these chauvinists and fighting to subordinate the entire workers movement to it. Lenin rejected this, asserted that the fight for revolutionary Marxism was a **fight**, and that for its victory what needed to happen was to ruthlessly struggle against these new social-democratic roadblocks that split the working class—not papering over differences.

The left opposition fought for this same program in new conditions. The political expression of a growing bureaucracy, Stalinism renounced the Bolsheviks' fight for international revolution in favour of seeking alliances with the international bourgeoisie and its agents within the workers movement. Applying the lessons of the past, the left opposition concluded that it was necessary to struggle against this bureaucracy and the nationalist program it championed, a new massive roadblock that stood in the way of international revolution. Those who reject this fight and assign the rise of Stalinism to some "structural reasons" that were inevitable given the material conditions do the very same thing as Kautsky did. Whether they like it or not they are resigning themselves to these new roadblocks.

And of course this was not some one and done deal. Even in Trotsky's time he had to constantly apply Marxism in rapidly changing conditions. Today, the task is the same. We cannot be content with repeating old slogans, but in the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky, we must apply revolutionary Marxism to the new conditions of the 21st century.

To resign ourselves by saying that the massive back steps of the working class was due to "structural changes" or just some automatic backwards retrogression of the working class is simply renouncing the fight for revolutionary leadership, the fight for a revolutionary program. And in fact that is what the Spartacist League did for 30 years before our reorientation, denouncing the workers as hopelessly backwards and disorganised due to the retrogression of consciousness in the post-Soviet period—that the task was to hide in our bunkers for better times. And while much of the left could make fun of this open admission of defeat, in practice they were not much different if not worse.

To break from this course, we had to root ourselves in the material basis of the current world juncture—that the post-Soviet period was defined by American hegemony whose interests was to spearhead globalisation and deindustralisation. It is from this basis that we could demonstrate why the pro-capitalist leaders of the working class (with the left at their tail) dragged us down this path, destroying unionised industry and driving swathes of the working class away from the unions and eventually to the hands of right-wing demagogues.

Yes, the weak and divided nature of the workers movement is, caused by real objective problems, but these issues were paved and engendered by the Laborite leaders of the class who dragged it down this road. If we wanted to even begin to take steps forward, we **must** wage a ruthless struggle against these leaders and those who conciliate with them. There is no other road to fight for a revolutionary party. Today, this task is even more pressing with Trump tearing down this very liberal order to prepare the US and its imperialist allies for war against China. **That** is the relevance of Trotskyism today.

Let me touch briefly on some specific tenets considered as typically Trotskyist.

Firstly, the transitional program. What is it? I often hear people trying to argue that the transitional program rejects the minimum-maximum program in place of a special set of Trotskyist demands. Nothing could be further from the truth. I would argue that it is the opportunist social democrats that betray the struggle for the demands of the minimum-maximum program. Those who would every Sunday preach for revolution in the indefinite

future before going to their day job of securing at best limited reforms through elections, arbitration, half-hearted strikes, or other means of horse-trading. In a way not too different from how the "Friends of Palestine" Laborites today preach for a free Palestine before going to their day job of supporting the genocide-supporting Labor government.

What the Comintern sought to do, which Trotsky and the Fourth International elaborated on, was to **bridge** the gap between the struggles today and the question of state power. This meant demonstrating that in this era of imperialist decay the struggle for even the smallest demands cannot be separated from the question of the struggle for state power. What was needed in the fight for the smallest and biggest demands was one and the same: **revolutionary leadership.**

Now, on Permanent Revolution. This recognises that in the oppressed and neocolonial countries, the democratic and national questions remain the foremost questions that define the destitute conditions of the toiling masses. But fighting to advance these tasks, let alone fighting for their resolution, cannot be left to the leadership of the national bourgeoisie. While they can lean on the masses against imperialism, and that it is even in their own interests to push back against the imperialist yoke in their country, they will ultimately betray this struggle because of their class connections with the imperialists and their fear of the masses which, to quote Trotsky, "threatens to deprive the bourgeoisie of the possibility to exploit altogether."

Thus, the fight for national liberation must be waged under the leadership of the working class. For this, the proletarian vanguard must champion the struggle against imperialism as central and demonstrate to the toiling masses that the struggle to achieve even the most basic democratic tasks will be betrayed by the national bourgeoisie. Even with the establishment of a workers state, the struggle for victory of socialism cannot be completed in one country but must be connected with international revolution—especially revolution in the imperialist countries.

This in no way was alien to Lenin and the Bolsheviks. The Russian revolution alone is testament to this. And later, the lessons of the revolution were applied internationally in the first four congresses of the Comintern, seen for instance with the Theses on the Eastern Question of 1922. Neither is this alien to "advanced" Australia—with all the necessary modifications, Permanent Revolution is just as applicable to the democratic struggles here.

What about bureaucratically deformed/degenerated workers states? What does this actually mean? Much like a union is a working-class organisation which is usurped by a bureaucracy, bureaucratically deformed workers states are workers states, established through the revolutionary destruction of capitalism, which are controlled by a narrow caste of bureaucrats who administer the states not in the interests of world revolution but in the interests of their little clique. And just like with unions, the task is to struggle to oust these bureaucrats, in this case through a fight for workers political revolution. Historically, the classic example was the Soviet Union, but today the biggest example is the People's Republic of China, as well as Cuba, the DPRK, Vietnam and Laos.

Just like how a militant unionist will never listen to a scab, workers of these countries will never be won over to those who scab or abstain on the struggle to defend the gains of these revolutions. Those supposed revolutionaries who do so will only push workers towards these bureaucrats, who in turn will do everything in their power to subdue the masses and conciliate with imperialists.

I often hear, "what's the relevance of this in little faraway Australia?" Today American imperialists and their Australian allies are grinding down the global south and preparing for war against China. This is fundamentally against the interests of the Australian working class who will be strangled under the bourgeoisie's tightening vice as it prepares for this death struggle—the attack on the CFMEU is just the beginning.

The Australian working class must champion the struggles for national liberation and the defence of the gains of the Chinese revolution. If we do not do this, we will be slapping away some of the strongest potential allies of the Australian working class. And let me tell you, Australian workers will never be able to win, let alone hold on to revolution, if it does not forge this alliance with the working class of China, and Asia more generally.

So what is the relevance of Trotskyism today? It is the modern expression of revolutionary doctrine of Marxism. It offers a program to unite the toiling masses in a common struggle against imperialism, the only road to forge a revolutionary party in Australia and the world over.

Thank you. ■

The Marxist Brotherhood? The Egyptian Revolution and How the Arab Spring Failed

The Arab Spring continues to weigh on Middle Eastern politics, and the Socialist Left. ***Mila Volkova*** *analyses the failure of the Egyptian revolution and how the Left oriented itself toward this spontaneous movement.*

An Egyptian soldier atop a tank in Tahrir Square, during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution CC BY-SA 3.0

June 6, 2010, a young Egyptian man is composing music in an internet café before he is arrested by two police officers. His crime? Recording the officers selling drugs on his mobile phone and posting it to Facebook. The café owner asked that they do their business outside. The cops obliged him and beat Khaled Mohamed Saeed to death on the sidewalk instead. For the remainder of the year, protests simmered across social media and in the streets under the slogan "we are all Khaled Mohamed Saeed". The last straw for the Egyptian masses came on 4 January 2011, when Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor whose cart was shut down by police for being unable to afford a government permit, set himself on fire outside of the Governor of Sidi Bouzid's office. Reportedly, he cried "If you don't see me, I'll burn myself!" before striking the match that would melt winter and ignite the Arab Spring.

Bahrain, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen – mass pro-democracy protests rocked all these countries. But most importantly for the masses of the Middle East exploited by imperialism, they reached Egypt. Due to Egypt's size, relative economic development, and its border with both Israel and Gaza; any attempt to secure freedom in the region relies on victory in Egypt. The US' foreign security apparatus is aware of this and worked hard to protect Israel, its regional aircraft carrier, from revolutionary threats – using all means necessary in 2011 - 2013.

Conservative estimates placed Egypt's structural poverty in 2011 at an enormous scale: at least half of employment in Egypt was in the informal sector (thus rife with underpayment, poor conditions, and violence), the unemployment rate was at least 25%, and more than that were below the absolute poverty line (let alone relative poverty, which was a greater figure still). This was because of the failure of Gamel Abdel Nasser's regime of national development, which collapsed in 1970. Because of the structural imposition of the US dollar as the currency of global trade, wannabe developmentalist states must ensure that their export industries are internationally competitive. Otherwise, they cannot bring in enough US dollars to fuel their import substitution strategy – where domestic agriculture is deliberately underdeveloped and food/industrial inputs are imported to prioritise industrial development. Unable to compete with western industries and their partners in South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, Nasser's regime suffered a current-account crisis (when there are not enough dollars to pay for all foreign debts and imports).

What followed was Infitah, or "opening up". Beginning under Sadat but truly achieved under Mubarak, IMF and World Bank loans that gave the Egyptian government enough dollars to avoid collapse were swapped for de-regulation, privatisation, and dramatic cuts in subsidies for basic goods such as bread and petrol.

The working class responded with waves of spontaneous industrial action. In the period between 2004 and 2012, workers went on strike more times than several of the previous decades combined, with 2011 and 2012 being particularly intense. Most of these actions were organised outside of the institutionalised trade unions, which were grouped into the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) by the government and dominated by bureaucrats or Nasserist socialists loyal to the state. Class war was not just limited to the cities. Subsistence farmers and rural workers began a defensive campaign of struggle against state-backed land commodification and monopolisation by large landowners.

A social crisis had been inevitable in Egypt since the breakdown of Nasser's totalitarian state apparatus. All social functions had been swallowed

up by the state: trade unions, private business, demographic planning, education, political parties – all were subordinated to a program of national economic development guided by the army and the bureaucracy with Nasser at the head. The inevitable contradictions of a peaceful and national road out of imperialist exploitation forced Infitah, after which the Egyptian state lost the capacity to directly mediate social conflict and legitimise itself. More and more of the work of reproducing capitalism ideologically, and providing welfare to struggling workers, was contracted out to NGOs and private business, who cared more about cutting costs to the bone than the long-term survival of capitalism. The revolt in Egypt that began in 2011 was a result of a crisis of reproduction caused by the state's hands-off approach. It is no surprise, then, that the Muslim Brotherhood (an Islamist organisation banned by the Egyptian government and responsible for assassinating Nasser's successor, President Sadat), Egypt's largest service provider and the largest recipient of government funding through its front organisations, was also the largest opposition party from 2011 – 2013.

When President Mubarak announced his intention for his son to succeed him as President, tens of thousands of protestors occupied Tahrir square in Cairo. They hosted public meetings and demanded Mubarak's resignation and a democratic civilian government. After suffering regular brutal attacks by internal security forces, they marched on the presidential palace. To pre-empt total revolution, the military stepped in and forced Mubarak to resign. They replaced him with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), who promised new free elections.

The following elections (the freest in Egyptian history) for the upper and lower houses in January 2012 brought a 60% majority coalition of Islamist parties, of which the Muslim Brotherhood (through their proxy the Freedom and Justice Party) held a significant plurality. The Brotherhood and SCAF began a tug of war over the state which lasted throughout 2012. Secular opposition forces including workers' groups, activist NGOs, and the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), were largely external to this process. The protest movement, in which the Islamist and secular groups were initially somewhat united, began to break down. Secularists preferred a continuation of military dictatorship, with a possible democratic transition later, to the increasingly likely prospect of a Sharia constitution. The uprising had effectively lost its momentum by 2013, when SCAF forcibly removed President Morsi (the Brotherhood's candidate elected in 2012), dissolved both houses, opened fire on Tahrir Square, and placed General al-Sisi upon the presidential throne via a dubiously free referendum – with the support of the secular opposition (including RS).

The revolution is thus a tale of two cities. On the one hand, there is the conflict that took place between different factions of the Egyptian elite over the structure of the state and over their strategy towards American imperialism. This mythology is supported by its analysts and propagators in the academy: Modernisation theorists who argue that "middle class" activism and a strong "civil society" are the basis for a transition to democracy. On the other hand, there is the class struggle between the Egyptian masses and their rulers over the nature of political power, political and social freedom, support for the Palestinian struggle, and for quality of life.

The View from the Tower

The narrative of modernisation goes like this: the "middle class" – meritocratic, economical, and liberal – is the protagonist of democratic values through its impulse to create free civil society groups, which spread those values to the masses. The exact size, confidence, and influence of the middle class is dictated by economic development and, therefore, modernisation creates democracy. This middle class is usually defined vaguely and includes well-off professionals, white-collar workers, and wealthy business owners.

From this perspective, the following problems existed in Egypt: the country was a net importer of virtually all goods and services, and chronically reliant on American foreign aid which constituted most of Egypt's strong GDP growth under Mubarak (though this did not bother the US all that much). Successive 'rescue packages' had forcefully undermined the Egyptian tax base, leading to a reliance on unproductive consumption taxes and rents charged on oil sales and traffic through the Suez Canal. The result was a constant budget deficit, enforcing a vicious cycle of further dependence on US loans for state liquidity.

This situation was not a problem for the Egyptian elite on the face of it, many of whom had transformed themselves into financiers profiting off corruption, state contracts, and foreign investment into speculative bubbles in tourism and the like. However, it was of particular concern to certain parties of the Egyptian elite. Firstly, to educated professionals reliant on the development of advanced industry and the public service for employment. Secondly, to the officers of the armed forces which had been systematically sidelined from their once prominent role under Nasser. But are either of these parties reliable friends of democracy?

The strong emphasis of contemporary academia on the role of educated professionals in the

revolution is misguided. This category could include, at most, 5% of the Egyptian population in 2011. Though this group had some interest in Egypt's democratisation, and plenty of influence through its mastery of social media, they played a decisively reactionary role in the revolution. If a civil society organisation, though formally separate from the state, receives funding from the state to plug gaps in state welfare provision, and is also reliant on foreign aid paid for by the USA – how can it be thought of as opposing the status quo? During the revolution, these NGOs demobilised welfare demands on the state and wage demands on businesses to ensure their own survival.

Though the Muslim Brotherhood had a large male working-class membership, it was led by educated professionals in the civil service, mosques, and in Islamic hospitals and NGOs. Following neoliberalisation, local and regional Egyptian state officials developed extensive patronage networks with Islamic mutual aid groups, on the condition that they de-politicised. The Brotherhood was effectively transformed into a para-state apparatus. Islam had also become something of a state ideology under Mubarak. Part of the Brotherhood's success had come from the post-Infitah growth of a large informal network of remittances from Egyptian migrants to the gulf, which was largely controlled by the Brotherhood. This lead to the development of a wealthy Islamic banking class, which was officially sponsored by the government.

Summed up, this meant that the Brotherhood was not a revolutionary force in the revolution, and the Brotherhood had much to lose from democratisation and thorough social reform. Though most protestors were Muslim, the Brotherhood made no effort to properly support the revolt. Instead, it focused entirely on its election campaign. Once they had secured both houses and the presidency, they did not implement the demands of the Egyptian masses to begin a democratic transition, take a hard stance against Israel, and implement a welfare state. They did the exact opposite in every instance.

With regards to the military, many claim that the military held a dominant position in Egyptian society. Though certain ex-generals had acquired massive private wealth during Infitah, the military as an institution had been completely sidelined compared to the ballooning internal security apparatus – which had aligned itself with Mubarak's network of civilian capitalist collaborators in the National Democratic Party. The security apparatus had some 2 million employees (an astronomical proportion of the population) compared to roughly 400,000 military staff. From the 1970s to 2011, military spending as a proportion of GDP had fallen from 33% to 2%. The military's business portfolio only returned a small profit, and they suffered with constant equipment shortages and poor quality of troops. During the uprising itself, though the military took an indifferent attitude to street action, they tacitly supported attacks by protestors on police, and they successfully liquidated the entire civilian bourgeois elite around Mubarak. This was done not out of any genuine interest in democratisation – which they explicitly opposed for fears of opening a pandora's box of social demands – but because they feared that Mubarak's son would keep them in this weak position were he to succeed his father as president.

The View from the Streets

So much for the ruling class. The task of winning the battle of democracy was left to the workers themselves. They faced enormous obstacles in this quest.

Though workers had been driven to the edge by poverty and punishing state oversight, the scope of workers' organisations from 2004 – 2013 were quite limited. Most striking workers simply requested that the state 'investigate' the issues – very few direct demands for the improvement of wages or conditions were made. The strikes thus tended to be apolitical in character, making no demands for democratisation even during the uprising itself. Spontaneously formed strike committees limited themselves to their workplace and dissolved immediately after the conclusion of a strike. The organisation of workers on a national scale was confined to the ETUF, which was overseen by the government, and workers found it difficult to move around or against it. As a result of all this, though the ideological hegemony of the state had basically broken down, the workers' movement was essentially paralysed – it could not rival the military and the Brotherhood in the contest for state power.

This isolation proved deadly when soldiers liquidated the protestors in Tahrir Square. The police had tried for three days to dislodge the 60,000 protestors in the square but retreated after they became exhausted and ran out of supplies. The Egyptian workers proved that the police are nothing but a paper tiger. But the same cannot be said of the armed forces – who can deploy concentrated and overwhelming firepower. Splitting the army to either paralyse or win over portions of it are, therefore, necessary tasks during a revolution. But there had been zero organised effort prior to 2011 to link urban workers with the rural poor (which most army conscripts were) and soldiers.

Aside from the state-approved union bureaucrats in the ETUF, the working class was also chronically misled by Nasserist and Stalinist

'socialists'. The repressive apparatuses of the state meant that many ostensibly socialist groups went through a process of de-politicisation much like the Brotherhood. The legacy of Nasserism cannot be overstated; many socialists were nostalgic for the era of national developmentalism and saw the primary revolutionary force as the army.

All these obstacles indicated the need for a vanguard party to challenge the misleadership of the class, contest the hegemony of capitalist ideology, link workers with one another, uphold the political independence of the working class from the ruling elite, and infiltrate the military to affect a split. These tasks fell to RS by default, who were the only committed socialists in Egypt during the revolution. They did not rise to the occasion.

From the early 2000s onwards, and during the revolution itself, RS pursued an alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood in opposition to Mubarak's regime, including open support for Morsi's presidential campaign. The claim was (and is still maintained by RS to this day) that the Brotherhood is a progressive, anti-imperialist, and pro-democratic force oppressed by the regime. Although it used to be a violent anti-communist organisation dominated by petty capitalists, it has since become a mass movement of unemployed youth, workers, and reformist professionals. According to RS, opposition to the Brotherhood is tantamount to support for Mubarak's repressive secular regime.

This claim is dubious on the face of it. Though it's true that the Brotherhood developed a mass membership of young male students and unemployed, its rigid internal hierarchy and bureaucratic structure ensured that it was (and continues to be) dominated by an elite clique of clerics, bankers, and wealthy professionals. The organisation thus had an undeniably bourgeois character. Furthermore, the Brotherhood was structurally reliant on the neoliberal status quo – they only entered the revolution to seek the incorporation (and empowerment) of their massive Islamic welfare network into the state apparatus via Sharia law. They had no interest in subverting the work-fare system of conditions and exploitation, only in its Islamisation. Once in power, the Brotherhood totally compromised on their opposition to Israeli colonialism to secure financial aid from the US to prop up their government. Beyond the bare fact that a Sharia constitution was obviously going to be undemocratic, authoritarianism is a necessary condition of US imperialism's relationship with Egypt because (due to popular sentiment) any genuinely democratic Egypt would be extremely anti-Israel. Somehow, RS seems to have been taken totally by surprise when the Brotherhood made the move towards repressive Islamist rule. It is even unclear to what extent Mubarak's regime could be described as secular. Though the regime was anti-Islamist, Mubarak appealed to Islam and his personal piety repeatedly to legitimise his authority.

But RS' strategy in Egypt was informed by more than just a misreading. As a sister party of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) in the United Kingdom set up by the late Tony Cliff, and an unofficial part of the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) centred in the US, RS displays the same tendency to be soft on Islam. This is not to suggest that Marxists should be lecturing Muslim workers on their personal faith. Rather, that communists have a duty to analyse the structural role played by all religious institutions, understand which classes are involved in them, and recognise that the movement of workers to abolish the status quo is necessarily self-interested and atheistic politically-speaking. Anti-clericalism is a basic requirement of socialist politics. Making this point to most socialists of the Cliffite tradition, including members of Socialist Alternative here in Australia, is met with the accusation of "Islamophobia".

My intention here is not to make a sectarian attack. I have no interest in "I told you so-s". I must assume that, as socialists, my Cliffite comrades are not stupid, and that they are aware of the nature of the Muslim Brotherhood. The purpose of this essay is to analyse the failure of the Arab Spring and entreat that my Cliffite comrades re-consider their strategy. This strategy was properly tested for the first time in the Arab Spring, and it demonstrably failed.

This strategy is that of spontaneity. Informed by Cliff's reading of Luxemburg and Lenin, RS avoided putting forward demands or rhetoric which were assessed as ahead of the current political consciousness of the masses. In this view, workers are assumed to already possess a disjointed form of revolutionary consciousness. All that is necessary is for socialists to build the confidence of the workers to articulate themselves, seize power, and implement their vision. Socialists must therefore avoid "talking down to the masses". "Meet them where they're at" is a common Cliffite phrase.

Putting openly revolutionary ideas directly in front of the masses before they are "ready" is criticised as "programmatism" that isolates socialists from workers and undermines the capacity for socialists to lead the struggle when it finally becomes revolutionary. To do otherwise is simultaneously bureaucratic, reformist, and ultra-leftist – pejoratives all launched at the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (RCO) by Socialist Alternative. The vanguard organisation must maintain the purity of its revolutionary

theory (proven by history to be that of Cliffite Trotskyism) so that it will chart the right path when the time comes. Therefore, only particular individuals with pre-existing, and organically developed, socialist tendencies should be recruited into the vanguard organisation.

The theory of spontaneity holds that the revolutionary situation only develops out of the unpredictable daily struggles of the masses and their innate human creativity. Clandestine organisation within the military is seen as unnecessary by Cliffites because they believe that the workers will create a dual power structure during the revolution, including armed militias, and this will be sufficient to simply displace and then replace the capitalist state. During the Egyptian revolution, RS proclaimed that "the wave of social revolution is widening every day!" simply through its own momentum.

But the masses did not spontaneously develop a revolutionary inclination. Instead, RS neglected the necessary and decades-long effort of spreading revolutionary ideology. History has proven time and time again that without the patient effort of socialists to directly challenge capitalist ideology and present a positive alternative prior to the revolt, the masses are left confused and uncoordinated when revolt must spill over to revolution.

The result was that RS did the work of the military for them by corroborating the claim that all opposition to military rule can be dismissed as Islamist. Though Cliffites may reply that they put conditions on their "critical support" for the Morsi presidency, such as democracy and freedom for trade unions from state interference, what good are conditions if one is not able to enforce them? It was inevitable that RS would rely on the military to stop the implementation of a Sharia constitution because it had not built up an alternative political structure of its own. Doing so would have necessitated the work of building up a mass party of the entire working class, independent of Islam and all other capitalist ideologies, and free to determine its own politics and strategy. Are we supposed to be impressed by the analysis, seemingly repeated by the followers of Cliff after every potentially revolutionary situation has passed, that the masses were, in fact, not ready? Well, whose fault was it that they weren't, comrades?

This is relevant to our Australian context because Socialist Alternative, the largest socialist group in Australia today, pursues fundamentally the same failed strategy as RS. They would, however, reject this characterisation on the grounds that they were expelled from the ISO for disagreeing with their prevailing "1930s in slow motion" thesis in favour of their own view that we are in a period of "revolutionary downturn" (itself probably a correct assessment at the time). Solidarity, the ISO's group here in Australia, sucks up to the trade union bureaucracy and the Labor party, and Socialist Alternative doesn't. Socialist Alternative have set up the Socialists, a mass workers' party led by hard-working revolutionaries. Who else organises all these massive protests? Who else has done all these wonderful things? Who can challenge that we are the biggest and the greatest? But opportunism is opportunism, comrades, whether it take the form of tailing the trade union leadership (as Solidarity does) or tailing the Greens/activist street movements (as Socialist Alternative does).

Revolution is not cottagecore, and revolutionary ideas cannot be spread politely. RS and the other Cliffite sects dare not criticise Islam and other hegemonic ideologies for fear of coming across as elitist. But what is more elitist than thinking that the average worker is just too stupid and immature to take even gentle criticism? What is more opportunistic than pandering to Islam, a structurally misogynistic faith run by oligarchs and capitalists?

For all Socialist Alternative's "outrage!" and cries of "shame!" against the capitalist class and their dogs in Labor, the failure of Egypt and of the Arab Spring demonstrate what will happen if their spontaneist and opportunist strategy is carried out here in Australia: paralysis and confusion of the working class, poor organisation, compromise on the political independence of the working class, tacit support for class collaborationist leadership, and military counterrevolution. Simply put: death, immiseration, failure.

I urge my comrades of the Cliffite tradition to reconsider their dogmatic adherence to this strategy, that any major criticism of will earn you an expulsion from Socialist Alternative (it was this very reason why the RCO did not join Socialist Alternative as a faction within it). We must commit to a collective, open, and honest accounting of our 21st century and its numerous failures. What was Occupy? Why did the Arab Spring turn to autumn? Why were the meagre victories of the Movement of the Squares so easily turned back? We can only answer these questions if we are finally united into a single, democratically organised, communist party. ■

Socialists & Spontaneous movements

How should socialists relate to the spontaneous street movements that have popped up over the last decade? ***Remi*** *answers this question, with a focus on the Black Lives Matter protests that took place in 2020.*

Over five years since Minneapolis police murdered George Floyd and the subsequent riots, we again see the streets of the US taken by radicals, this time fighting Trump's mass deportation policies. These spontaneous outbursts are crucial to the fight for socialism and thus it is important to make serious reflection on their potential along with their failures.

George Floyd protesters, 2020. Photo: Dan Aasland CC BY-SA 2.0

Following the murder of George Floyd, millions of outraged Americans took to the streets against a racist system. City after city became a battle between protesters and the police, with around ten percent of the American population participating in the struggle. The streets were filled with protesters demanding an end to police brutality . Many of these protesters, Mike Macnair argues, "unconsciously echoed the classic Marxist programme, carried 'defund the police' or 'abolish the police' home-made placards.",[1] demonstrating a clear revolutionary potential. In response, these protesters were met with highly militarised police who assaulted them with batons and rubber bullets. This violent crackdown, however, did not stop the protests; the protesters made use of creative tactics to avoid or weaken police crackdown, while at the same time sections (and at the start the most popular sections) strongly opposed the reformist elements of the movement which called for peaceful protests. This included the burning down of the third precinct of the Minneapolis police department, only three days after the murder, with police forced to retreat.[2] The revolutionary potential is clear in these riots, with the working class, irrespective of race, coming out to fight the police and in some cases forming street defence committees to organise themselves.[3] The movement demonstrated not just solidarity among Americans, but internationally. Similar protests took place across the world, including in Australia, in which workers link this struggle to that of our own racialised policing. In many ways, their protests worked. They succeeded in fighting the demonisation in the capitalist media, with a majority of Americas believing the burning of the precinct to be justified.[4] Despite all this, however, why was BLM only able to achieve its most insignificant of aims, such as the arrest of Floyd's murderers, while police budgets have only risen?

The lack of a conscious, organised, socialist force is to blame. After months of protesting, clashes with the police could only take it so far, and without a conscious socialist organisation, it was left to the spontaneous passion and anger of the working class and the divisions within it. Without this conscious force, any spontaneous movement and its ideology will inevitably fall into the unconscious ideology of the ruling class. This is what Althusser describes as happening in the "spontaneous ideology of scientists", and as Donald Parkinson argues, "it also makes sense to speak of the spontaneous ideology of activists".[5] This was clearly seen in the BLM movement, which, divided and largely unconscious, fell under the leadership of the reformist elements of the movement; including the NGOs, the faith and community leaders (which of course only represent the ruling class of any community!) and black petty bourgeoisie. These forces

[1] MacNair, Mike. "*The Police And-Standing Army To*." (Weekly Worker, 2022).
[2] "*The Siege of the Third Precinct in Minneapolis.*" 2020. CrimethInc.
[3] "*Five Years Since George Floyd*" (The Communist - RCA, 2025)
[4] "*54 Percent of Americans Think Burning Down Minneapolis Police Precinct Was Justified After George Floyd's Death.*" (Newsweek, 2020).
[5] Parkinson, Donald. *"without a party, we have nothing"*. (Cosmonaut, 2020). See also, Althusser, Louis. "Philosophy and the spontaneous ideology of the scientist", chapter three. (Verso Books, 2012)

Minnesota state troopers. Photo: Tony Webster CC BY-SA 2.0

sought a tactic of class collaborationism, lining up behind the Democratic party, tying the black working class to the preferred party of American capitalism. This is not to say that there are no organisations or social forces that struggled against this, however they were isolated. The socialist sects of America are tiny and disorganised, representing only the smallest section of workers and in competition with each other, they are smaller than the sum of their parts. As a result, they were unable to make any meaningful socialist intervention. Instead, they were left to chase after the protests, tailing its conservative leadership, running from protest to protest.

In "Party as Articulator"[1] Mohandesi argues, quoting Poulantzas,[2] that one of the key tasks of the state is not just to articulate, meaning to unite social forces, the forces of the ruling class "but to ruthlessly disarticulate all oppositional social forces". This process divides the social forces and maintains the division among the radical forces within BLM and other social movements, producing sectarian conflicts. The state may, when needed, articulate forces, however, only in an abstract manor such as 'the black community' in which members are united "only in their separation", without real agency members are told what to think by state appointed leaders which prop up the unconscious ideology. The state does this because it is aware that unity is the only thing that can overthrow the capitalist class. Without an alternative, unified, conscious force, this is the inevitable fate for the spontaneous struggles of the future.

The party offers a solution here, to act as "the great articulator" whereas the state is "the great dis-articulator". A socialist workers party can unite the different social forces of BLM opposed to the capitalist class, and in doing so, the party can discipline and temper the movement into a coherent and consistent force. In this unity, the party can go beyond the spontaneous clashes of the police and maintain a continuous and conscious fight. The BLM and LA riots mobilised millions of ordinary workers, who otherwise only engaged in politics at the ballot box, into a struggle for politics on the streets. The Communist Party, then, poses the potential to transform this struggle into a struggle not just on the streets, not just for this outburst of struggle, but into a consistent struggle against all aspects of capitalism. Masses of workers were made aware of the working-class struggle, and the Communist Party offers them a permanent home in this struggle among its ranks. In doing so the party transforms the struggle from an unconscious sporadic movement to a conscious fight for socialism.

The key task for socialists then is of course to fight for a communist party, through revolutionary regroupment (or articulation) of the socialist sects around programmatic unity. This is the only way that we can turn these spontaneous moments into revolutionary ones which develop the class struggle. Socialists cannot wait for a mass party to fall into their laps spontaneously. These movements cannot go beyond their unconsciousness without a mass party which can educate workers on a mass scale, and we must fight for this consciously. BLM was not the first spontaneous struggle, and it certainly won't be the last.

There are two key lessons which should be taken from BLM in regards to the fight for a communist party. Firstly, in our orientation to the spontaneous movement, communists must act in communication and cooperation with each other. Comrades must fight against the state's disarticulation, and we must fight for this within our own ranks. It is working together in this struggle that comrades may be able to forge unity which goes beyond our sectional groupings. The second lesson is that communists must remember the struggle for a communist party to be the primary one. We cannot lose ourselves to the spontaneous movement entirely, chasing protest after protest, or we will become stuck in such a cycle. This is not to say the spontaneous movements are not important for socialists, but that we must not let it replace party building, to do so prevent us from moving beyond them. ■

[1] Mohandesi, Salar. *"Party As Articulator"*. (Viewpoint Magazine, 2020).
[2] Poulantzas, Nicos. "State, Power, Socialism" (Versobooks, 2014)

China & the Left

The Australian National University (ANU) chapter of the Platypus Affiliated Society held a panel on September 25th, on the subject of China's rise and its contemporary lessons for the left. We publish here an abridged version of the opening statements given by ***Christina Veselovskiy*** *of the RCO. Barry York (c21stleft) and Lachlan (Communist Party of Australia) were also on the panel.*

Mao Zedong (left), with Australian communist Edward F. Hill (middle), and Joyce Hill (right)

Fifteen minutes of speaking tonight would hardly do justice to the task of understanding the most important political entity of the last 50 years, and indeed the next 100. I want to be upfront about what I believe, which is that I do not think the real, existing ideology of the CCP offers any concrete lessons to our Communist project in the 21st Century. We can only discuss China in relation to its key role within the planetary form of Capitalism that confronts us in the 21st Century, and I thus want to structure my comments in two parts. I'll first offer a concise history of where and when I believe the Chinese Revolution made significant steps toward integration into the global capitalist system. I argue that this history was, if not entirely inevitable, a primary outcome of the historically misguided fusion of party and state. Second and lastly, I would like to outline the planetary condition that we, as Communists, are confronting, one which recognises China as part of a planetary capitalist system. We can only overcome such a system by abandoning the 20th-century dogmas of national liberation, merging party and state, and advocating for a socialist revolution in stages.

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First, I would like to provide a history of the People's Republic of China that does not assume fixed, abstract definitions of socialism, communism, or capitalism—concepts that exist at one moment but not at another. The Chinese Revolution, like all historical revolutions, was highly uneven and had to respond to a wide array of spontaneous desires, dreams, and visions across the population and indeed around the world. It is an oversimplification to say that the CCP emerged solely because of a crisis of national sovereignty amid imperialist aggression; the actual phenomenon penetrated much deeper into Chinese society. The decline of the Qing also meant the destruction of the imperial symbolic order, which, for all its restricted, aristocratic, and patriarchal nature, served as the common ground for nascent class struggle in the Chinese village. During the war, Mao Zedong Thought emerged as the ultimate solution to fill this gap in China's agrarian north, where local resistance to state authority had a long tradition, unlike in the more consolidated and state-centric south. I do not want to deny the significance of Yan'an and the revolutionary semiotics that emerged there, nor the powerful aftershocks seen in May '68. Mao Zedong Thought was a genuine harnessing of the libidinal energy of the masses, who were finally capable of engaging in class struggle within their local contexts. However, the contradiction that would surface after 1949 was already evident—balancing various struggles while synthesising them into a unified national effort against the Japanese and the GMD, followed by the need to build a sovereign socialist economy. This was a tall order, regardless of how one sliced it. If the Communist Party were to resolve this contradiction on its own, it would need to deliver a flawless performance.

Unsurprisingly, nothing went as planned since the fragmented structure inherited by the Communists in 1949 was unsuitable for such a smooth transition. China lacked a unified economy; its landscape featured tiny urban pockets amid vast rural areas. Urban institutions and industrial environments were unfamiliar to the largely rural cadres. The Communists inherited the primary industrial sector from the Japanese colony-state of Manchukuo, a territory designed around the violent processing and exploitation of Chinese labourers subject to conditions of bare life. Using these technologies, the CCP began to shape its understanding of the universal and the particular through the lens of a state,

A temporary monument displayed in Changsha, Hunan Province, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the CCP's founding. CC BY-SA 3.0

positioning itself as the sole mediator between the two poles and as the sole driver of social and productive liberation. These visions greatly overlooked the reliance of China's emerging industrial model on grain supplies from the countryside. When the Great Leap Forward started in 1957, decades of mass mobilisation rhetoric couldn't prevent the collapse of this relationship. The post-Leap retrenchment marks the moment when the inequalities underpinning capitalist enclosure first took shape, as legal and economic conditions began to solidify the infamous hukou system in place. In addition, new social attitudes towards commodity production began to replace the older displays of productivist power. The Mao books, Mao literature, Mao caps, and other such objects exported worldwide in 1968 should be seen for what they were: the first wave of Chinese commodities greeting the world of global communication and exchange. With genuine moments of mid-60s class struggle foreclosed upon by 1969, the subsequent years of the Cultural Revolution leading up to Mao's death were a procession of Rashomon-style theatrics intended to conceal the robust alliance of the party and the PLA keeping the decaying edifice in place– even in the often-fetishised Shanghai commune, voting was literally split down these lines in favour of a 2/3rds majority of party cadres and the military. All the conditions were right for the party to relinquish sole responsibility for its Sisyphean task of mediating the universal and the particular, of the masses and the state. It is no surprise, then, that these emerging consumer objects, which cultural revolution propaganda referred to as "Newborn Socialist Things," quickly became the site for reintroducing the commodity form into China during the reform years.

I would like to delay further discussion of China's post-1978 history until later this evening, as the focus should now shift to understanding our current task through the lens of China and its role in the global capitalist system. I believe that if we are to succeed, comrades must discard the fetishist trappings of the party-state form and understand that our present conditions all point towards the fundamentally bourgeois, exclusionist, neocolonial, and patriarchal character of the system of nation-states both China and Australia inhabit.

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The core idea of Marxism-Leninism in the 21st Century is to demand that comrades cease questioning history. The history they present suggests that at some stage, all Communists have faced a series of natural institutions that needed to be accepted and worked around: the state, the family, the nation, and the market. They argue that rather than criticising the bourgeois nature of this line of reasoning, we should instead revise Marx himself to suit the axiomatic logic of real existing socialism. When we stop asking questions, our comrades become little more than sports fans, cheering on the Frankenstein-like collection of centre-right and right-wing autocracies loosely gathered around China's arms-length diplomatic pacts, deluding ourselves that they ultimately aim to rival America as one united movement. I am highly sceptical of the 'dual stage' model of revolution these comrades put forward, as the historical record shows a tendency to focus solely on the first stage while rarely discussing the second. But for the sake of argument, let's analyse their programme to understand their misguided and out-of-touch plan for achieving socialism after conquering the state.

In the mid-1960s, it would have been ridiculous for us to do what Stalin did and argue in favour of building our own Magnitogorsk in the Pilbara ranges. Today, it would be similarly fantastical to imagine a world where Australia, like China, could compete at the forefront of green manufacturing without the industrial expertise, with a domestic population barely two per cent of China's, and to do all this while refusing to make any concessions to the living standards of ordinary Australians of the kind necessary to replicate the massive wealth transfers China's government grants its exporting firms at the expense of its domestic households. We would be chasing a promised return to Fordist society and living conditions that, for structural reasons, can never return. This isn't because Chinese labourers work for

Establishment of Shanghai Chuansha County Revolutionary Committee, posted in 1967. The slogan in the middle of the picture reads: "All power to Chuansha County Revolutionary Committee!"

cheaper and we'd have to adapt to this challenge – China itself is undergoing massive deindustrialisation behind the shimmer of high-tech products. The task at hand involves understanding finance and manufacturing as interconnected industries, each supporting the uneven development patterns now mirrored globally. By 2025, what we once called the periphery of capitalist development is now its hinterland. The fundamental truth is imprinted on our very bodies here in this room. Chances are that your skin is more familiar with commodities finished in the scorching heat of the Pearl River Delta than with the caresses of those you care about most.

Thanks to social media, nearly everyone in this room could probably place the supposed neon utopias of Shanghai or Chongqing on a map. I'd hazard that very few here could locate cities like Shijiazhuang, Zhengzhou, or Anshan, where the belly of the carbon-intensive beast lies in the smog enveloping their populations. For all the tools Marx gave us, we seldom see capital in such a visible form as in this industrial smog. But the one thing Marx would point out is that beneath this smog lies the territorial and social origins of this eldritch beast. A Chinese academic pointed out in 2014 that if enclosure in England was a process whereby "sheep devoured people," our modern-day counterpart in China's urban wastelands is a phenomenon where "buildings devour people." Brutal land conflicts initiated by millions of precarious migrant labourers against party officials are part and parcel of the everyday running of the Chinese labour market. Capitalism is not simply the force that undermines and subverts all the stable things we hold dear; with its other hand, it fashions new social and geographic configurations that reinstate hierarchies, heighten inequalities, and further segment forms of human activity, all so that people must sell their labour to continue existing. Here, the distinction between the "public" and "private" sectors is largely irrelevant when the lines between local, provincial, and party governments become blurred by the complex shareholding patterns of Chinese firms. We have in this system only one instance of the territorial structures that make capitalism possible on a global scale. The neocolonial condition is primarily a contradiction: we must simultaneously accept a never-ending desire to integrate ever more territory into a universal plane of market exchange, while keeping the subaltern "other"- the international proletariat— at a safe distance by erecting national and racial boundaries around their existence as subjects. As a microcosmic example of resisting this neocolonial bind, the fall of Apartheid in South Africa offers an important lesson. The end of white rule did not happen because the black population sought to establish independent socialist republics in the Bantustans. They only succeeded by seizing control of the colonial state itself. A dictatorship of the proletariat in this country, folded under the Chinese model and subject to the same form of party-state mediation, would be as deleterious to the goal of world socialism as a "Banthustan" solution to the question of Apartheid, or a "Socialist Gaza" solution to the question of Palestinian liberation.

If you were to ask what leaves me optimistic about China's present condition, one prominent point would be that China's willingness to integrate into the capitalist system is perhaps the most significant structural cause behind the climate crisis—the greatest crisis capitalism will ever face, and possibly the one thing that could lead to capitalism's demise in the coming decades. But even this strains believability. The only conclusion I can come to is that a war against the planetary capitalist system, especially in the metropoles, can only be fought in hell.

--- Conclusion ---

I'll sum up what's been said by briefly

answering tonight's questions. To call China Communist would be an oxymoron, as Communists seek the end of the nation and state. Maoism surpassed Stalinism in a discursive sense when Mao's Sinification of Marxism-Leninism paved the way for an indigenous application of nationwide political and armed struggle. Yet, in many ways, the Mao years mirrored the height of Stalinism in its uneven focus on production above all else. This fetishism foreshadowed the reintroduction of the commodity form and China's integration into the capitalist world order. I believe there are multiple Maoisms, each with unique discursive, affective, and strategic aspects, each possessing its own energy and corresponding material conditions. However, the state ideology of the PRC embodies a wholly nonrevolutionary offspring, one shaped by decades of party-state fetishism. This view of continuity over change neither elevates nor vilifies Mao, Deng, or Xi Jinping; the historical record on these figures is increasingly distant from the current struggles before us. The lessons I'd take are that our discussion tonight touches on a key dividing line: that separating Communists from those who fear, dismiss, or see as immature the spontaneous, living moments of revolutionary violence needed to overthrow the system- those who prefer Australia's orderly and "peaceful" drift into China's developmental path under the sterile, militant discipline of a singular party. It's as if revolutions were a clean, televisual military operation, like those I'd often see on the overhead screens on subway cars in Shanghai or Chengdu, rather than the messy, nauseating task of systematically tearing away the necrotic flesh of the global capitalist beast. ■

Canberra Socialists

Worker's Unity Caucus

Statement of Establishment

We are announcing ourselves as the Worker's Unity Caucus within the Canberra Socialists. Our aim is to foster diversity of opinion, affiliation and representation. We think that it is possible for the socialist party to genuinely represent the interests of workers, students and everyone else, and that our values will promote the creation of that party. We invite anyone interested in joining our caucus to reach out to us, so we can form an open and diverse space.

Join Us Today

SAlt v Soli: why splits on the Marxist left matter

Originally published in Labor Tribune, September 28, 2025

*Annoying to some, irrelevant to others, **David Lockwood**[1] argues we need to take splits seriously if we want to build a workers' movement capable of winning socialism.*

It is strange that the two groups on the Australian Marxist left that are most hostile to each other, Socialist Alternative and Solidarity, have the same political origins – and, in the case of very senior members, an early career in the same organisation.

Both originate from the International Socialists (IS), set up in 1975, based on the ideas of the IS in Britain and the US. The influence of the Americans faded over time and the International Socialists came to be strongly identified with the British group (which changed its name to the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) in 1976) and its overarching leader and theorist, Tony Cliff.

The Australian IS had two big ideas, essentially cribbed from Cliff. The first was an analysis of the Soviet Union as a state capitalist economy, presided over by a dictatorial ruling class (the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) which could only be removed by a workers' revolution. The same went for the rest of the Soviet bloc and also China, Cuba and so on. The second was the centrality of the working class in socialist revolution, influenced more by the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg than Vladimir Lenin. Once the student upsurge in Australia (1965-75) had spent itself, the early IS oriented heavily towards workers' struggles.

Both groups would claim adherence to the same ideas today. And yet, they are not only organisationally divided – they hate each other. This, naturally, gives rise to some grim joviality among the rest of the left – 'your worst enemy is the one closest to you'. But for the prospects for the Marxist left in Australia, it is a serious problem.

Socialist Alternative is the larger group, with some hundreds of members and more hundreds of supporters in the Victorian Socialists and their state equivalents. Solidarity, though much smaller, punches above its weight due to its consistent activism in broader groups – the Refugee Action Coalition being the most prominent example. So both groups are influential among the tiny ranks of the non-Labor Marxist left. But their blanket refusal to work with each other and the negative effect of two groups with virtually identical politics spitting venom at each other has a dispiriting effect in many areas of left activity.

In Palestine solidarity work, both organisations set up rival 'united fronts'. The same has happened in anti-fascist work in recent weeks, pathetically dividing activists between competing campaigns.

Keep active, avoid thinking

How did they come to this? Fear not, I will not drag you through the twists and turns of IS policy and the internal disputes to which they gave rise (some serious, some bizarre). You can read the accounts of Mick Armstrong (Socialist Alternative) and Ian Rintoul (Solidarity) for that. But the thing that might strike you as odd is that the disputes were overwhelmingly about tactics – about what the group should be doing, not doctrinal disputes or points of analysis.

As Armstrong puts it, "Socialists must be able to answer the central question in politics – what to do next." For Marxists and serious partisans of the working class, tactical disputes should be easily contained within the same disciplined organisation, but this seems not possible in the general Cliffite milieu.

[1] There are a number of accounts of IS history available, the best being Tom O'Lincoln's 'Marching Down Marx Street'. This article draws on the two most recent: Mick Armstrong, 'The Origins of Socialist Alternative,' Marxist Left Review, Number 1, Spring 2010; and Ian Rintoul, 'Whither the Propaganda Perspective?' Solidarity, 20 July 20210. Neither is completely accurate. In the interests of full disclosure, as a member of the IS (and subsequent iterations), I was a full participant in the internal frolics from 1975 to 1999.

There were a number of reasons for this concentration on day-to-day tactical questions. Firstly, the IS had no political program. In terms of theory, the group was based on the two Big Ideas outlined above. Tony Cliff in London always urging comrades to look for the 'next link in the chain'.

In practice this meant activity was based on whatever scheme the leadership had come up with to recruit new members. This was linked to the second reason which was that the group's main function was to recruit new members, whose main function was to recruit new members . . . and so on.

Thirdly, 'what to do next' was closely connected to the leadership's mortal fear of the group's members being idle and therefore losing enthusiasm, or worse, thinking for themselves. Demonstrations, campaigns, petitions and paper sales were vital in keeping the members occupied.

So, with politics pushed aside, internal debate (and there was a lot of it) circled around what activities would produce recruits and what they would do once recruited. Workers struggles or student work? Intervention or isolation? Routine activity or hyper-activism? Tactical differences generated over-heated disputes and produced resignations, purges and splits.

Without a program, tactics become all

If the group had had an agreed-upon program, discussions on strategy and tactics could have assumed their proper place and not become the centrepiece of the group's internal life. Discussions on strategy or tactics do not necessarily end in splits, but perhaps on an agreement to differ – within the bounds of the program. And there was a belief in the IS that only one strategy could be carried out at a time. Dissent was treachery.

The last internal bust-up started in 1993. By this time, the British SWP had decided that a revolutionary period was imminent and that everyone (in Britain and elsewhere) had better drop everything, get out and do something about it. The period was described as being "like the 1930s" – except "in slow motion". The Australian leadership dutifully took this up and a predictable round of frenzied activity and increasingly hysterical injunctions to "Build!" followed.

But in the middle of 1993, the leadership fell apart. Two of its leading members, Sandra Bloodworth and Mick Armstrong, were summarily purged from the National Committee for reasons that were never properly explained. The move had the full backing of the British organisation so perhaps it was because the two were not implementing the "1930s" madness properly.

In any case, the lack of any political reasoning behind the purge was illustrated by the fact that Armstrong and Bloodworth, having been strong supporters of the "1930s" nonsense, now discovered that they opposed it – and framed their 18-month campaign of trench-warfare against the remaining leadership in these terms.

After further expulsions and resignations, Socialist Alternative was formed in 1995. The rump International Socialist Organisation eventually became Solidarity. The ISO and Solidarity continued its outward focus, with Socialist Alternative retreating more to student work. In the medium term, sheltering during a period of low class activity has reaped some rewards for the now larger group.

Faction fights, purges and splits produce a fair amount of unpleasantness. The leaders of the contending groups that stagger out of the wreckage are not likely to be best friends, even when the dust settles. That is certainly one reason why the leaderships of the two groups hate each other so viscerally. Another is that they represent two sides of the original IS coin. The mothership SWP under Tony Cliff and epigones is renowned for this flip-flopping between isolationism and broad-frontism.

Solidarity embodies an earlier version, devoted to activism in broad committees and fronts. Socialist Alternative maintains elements of IS brashness and self-sufficiency (which some regard as sectarian).

Many in the labour movement no doubt shrug and dismiss this split as irrelevant, however division between them becomes a problem (for those on the outside) when the two organise against each other in political terrains that matter. For example, they attempt to carry out trade union work for Palestine through separate (and competing) committees. In Melbourne on 26 September, the Solidarity-aligned Refugee Action Collective organised its 'Unite Against Racism' Rally – while in a few weeks the SA-aligned 'Campaign Against Racism and Fascism' is organising its own.

The existence of the two groups stamping the same ground does not help the Marxist left. At the very least they should come back together on the basis of their common political positions. Further, Socialist Alternative should extend an invitation to Solidarity to join the Victorian Socialists and their state equivalents. And Solidarity should do so. ■

Civil War Continues

Originally published in the Weekly Worker #1554

Stay well clear of efforts to 'save' Your Party's launch conference by a self-appointed clique intent on staging their own coup, says ***Carla Roberts****. Instead rely on members, branches, STV elections and democracy*

It is difficult to keep up with the latest twists and turns in the saga that is Your Party. It looks like a shaky peace has been brokered between team Sultana and camp Corbyn, with Zarah Sultana withdrawing her daft legal threat for defamation and getting behind the 'official' membership launch that team Corbyn announced on the morning of September 24. Yes, it took her pretty much all day, but at 7pm, she announced: "I'm a member of Your Party - and if you haven't joined yet, you should too. For those who joined the previous system, data and membership will be migrated across in due course."

That probably explains why Sultana also just re-enabled the separate membership portal that she unilaterally launched on September 18 and then took down. Corbyn's public complaint that Sultana's email was "unauthorised" has serious legal consequences. Such allegations of a breach of the Data Protection Act cannot be withdrawn, even if you wanted to, which is why camp Corbyn quickly referred their complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office: "Failure to notify" the ICO carries a possible fine of "up to £8.7 million" - not quite as high as for the kind of "serious breach" Sultana had been accused of, which carries a "maximum fine of £17.5 million". It is unclear if Sultana herself or the company, MOU (which holds the membership fees), would be liable for any fine and if any potential rowing back by Corbyn would make any difference. Perhaps by relaunching the portal she wants to show 'evidence' that she did no worse than Corbyn, who has now also broken the existing 'agreement', according to which all six MPs are required to 'sign off' on the membership scheme. Be that as it may, two membership portals, both pointing to the same website, but with money flowing in different directions, is not exactly a good look.

Local party

And what about Corbyn's email, which states: "To join, you must be over 16, resident in the UK, and you cannot be a member of another political party"? What exactly is meant by this? After all, Corbyn has encouraged the setting up of tiny little local parties everywhere - his trusted comrade, Pamela Fitzpatrick, for example, launched her Harrow-based party, Arise; then there is Jamie Driscoll's party, Majority UK, and former Momentum boss Alan Gibbons has made the Liverpool Community Independents into a party, too. Or are 'local parties' allowed?

Is this perhaps an attempt to keep the organised left out? We know that Corbyn's right-hand woman, Karie Murphy, is very keen to keep the "Marxist sects" at arms length. Or perhaps it is just meant as a way to avoid Green Party or Labour Party members joining? Activists up and down the country were also quick to ask - will that ban include membership of Sultana's Your Party? Over 20,000 had joined that one.

What an absolute mess - and over what exactly? There are now some real political differences emerging. Sultana complained that she had been frozen out by a "sexist boys' club" - ie, the other five MPs of the Independent Alliance. However, the real power behind the throne is no 'boy' - it is Karie Murphy, who also happens to be the partner of Len McCluskey, former general secretary of Unite. She tightly controls the nascent structures of Your Party. Sultana's accusation is a reflection of the identity politics rife on university campuses. But she is also rather rapidly moving away from the kind of Labourism (loyalty to the constitution) epitomised by Corbyn.

At a meeting in Sheffield on the evening of September 24, she said: "Yes of course we must get rid of the monarchy, I am a republican." Later she stressed that, "the main difference between us and the Greens is that we are a class-based party, we recognise the power of the working class. We identity as a socialist party and proudly so. We are not pro-Nato, they are." She also stressed that "we are an anti-Zionist party". Corbyn might not agree with that one, but the 400 people in Sheffield certainly did.

She also apologised "for my role in the recent fights. I am sorry about the role I have played. But democracy is not something we can compromise on - when the train has left the station it is very difficult to turn it back. If we don't democratise the party, how will we be able to democratise society?"

When pressed from the floor on how she would do that, she explained that "these fights

we've had, they were all about democracy and empowering the grassroots members. I am critical of sortition, but now it has been announced, we have to make it as democratic as possible. And yes, I'm in favour of members and branches putting forward motions and amendments and that regional meetings should be autonomous and able to vote." She also disagreed with the apparent proposed ban on dual membership: "I don't agree with that; I think we need to unify the left. You have a voice, use your voice. We have to show that we are fighting for democracy, we are fighting to unify the left." Good.

Later however she explained that she also "pushed for 'one member one vote' at conference and it is very important that we got that one through." We would argue that she is in danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater by supporting OMOV - which is the most democratic decision-making mechanism locally and in smaller meetings, but turns into its opposite when it is applied to making national conference decisions by, say, 800,000 members. It isolates and atomises comrades who are watching and voting at home. Such a system clearly favours a bureaucracy which chooses the options, how they are presented, who gets to speak, etc.

Yes, Sultana is somewhat better than Corbyn, but we should be careful not to put our trust in either.

'Our Party'

At least the new-found, if somewhat shaky, peace should have blown out of the water the opaque initiative by 'Our Party', which has for some unfathomable reason gathered the support not just of Novara Media and professional turncoat Owen Jones, but also quite a few socialists, including some of the people involved in the Ken Loach-fronted Platform for a Democratic Party, members of RS21, the Democratic Socialist Platform in YP and leading members of Jewish Voice for Labour.

'Our Party' got surprisingly quickly out of the starting blocks (its website was registered in August). The day after the Corbyn-Sultana fallout, it launched an open, unsigned letter, proposing that a mysterious "handover team" should take over the entire data, all social media, all funds and every company associated with Your Party - in order to start a new membership drive and organise the election of a "founding stewards' committee", which would be "mandated to organise the party's founding conference and the process leading up to it, as previously laid out in Your Party communications". There is nothing quite like proposing to overcome a lack of democracy and secrecy with, well, a lack of democracy and secrecy - no wonder many described it as a coup.

The main organiser, Josh Virasami, tried his best to explain his motives in an interview with Novara Media and during a networking Zoom meeting of YP branches. And this is where things actually got interesting - not because of Our Party's misguided proposals (see below), but because it turns out that Virasami has been sitting on the "executive team of Your Party" for "several months" - a team that has been operating in total secrecy and without any kind of accountability. "I got brought in as a social movement person. I got carried along and got invited to do stuff, which is how I ended up on the executive team."

We learn that: "Your Party was stewarded by about 20 people on this executive team, made up from a diversity of grassroots social movements, prominent candidates, former trade union secretaries, current and former mayors. But somewhere along the line these 20 people suddenly became the six MPs."

Virasami has become the first person on that 'team' to answer questions publicly - and only because he just resigned from it (or perhaps he 'was resigned'). He did not say a peep when he was part of the top bureaucracy - in fact, he still supports the same bureaucratic methods. He explains that he was in charge of organising the regional conferences, to which "I had already recruited 12,000 facilitators" (ie, people who answered the YP email), which are to be "trained" by Roger Hallam's Assemble. These are going to be "great fun events", with "horizontal breakout rooms of 10-12 people each". Crucially, they will have - as we feared - no decision-making powers. He breathlessly explained:

> These breakout meetings would be able to discuss and hear amendments to the four documents submitted by YP nationally and the facilitators in each of these meetings would take copious amounts of notes. All the notes would then be collated and sent to the compositing process, including all comments and amendments made on the documents via the online members' portal. Members will be able to see all tracked changes on those documents.

He admitted that "the democratic process, however, is the brief of Karie Murphy and James Schneider" and that he did not know "how they would be able to go through what will be thousands and thousands of pages of notes". We can take a very good guess though:

they won't. Most suggestions will end up in the bin.

Murphy played a huge role in Corbyn's self-defeat over the anti-Semitism smear campaign and Schneider helped Jon Lansman shut down all democratic structures in Momentum. The fact that Corbyn is happy for these two to be put in charge of the 'democratic process' really says it all.Schneider has, incidentally, just resigned his role in Your Party, because he was so fed up with the ongoing civil war - a setback for Murphy, who has used him to try and rebuild all the bridges that she burns down. He was also supposed to write the draft constitution for YP - perhaps he has already done that (or perhaps somebody should check if Jon Lansman is available ...!).

Member's party

Corbyn's email of September 24 states that the launch conference has been booked to take place on November 29 and 30 in Liverpool - and it will be even worse than anticipated: "A total of 13,000 members will debate and amend the party's founding documents in person across two days, with 6,500 attending each day." In other words, the randomly chosen participants cannot even properly participate in the whole conference. What a joke.

This is our main problem with 'Our Party' proposals. Yes, they want to hold an election to the conference arrangements committee, but otherwise, "we just want that to implement that roadmap. We just want to deliver that conference - that's all this is." Virasami's motives are clear enough - he wants to become the saviour of Your Party, as leader of "a third pole in the YP leadership, which has been active for some time".

What is less clear is why any socialist would think it is a good idea to support Virasami's plans. It is understandable why Zarah Sultana supports them - she has been frozen out and is entirely powerless. But there is absolutely no chance of Corbyn's advisors giving up power.

Instead of trying to save current plans, we should be arguing for democratic structures and a launch conference that empowers members: branches should elect regional committees and national conference delegates through a simple and straightforward STV system.■

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Socialist Coffee Break
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marxist mondays is a weekly event where socialists meet for after work drinks and political discussions

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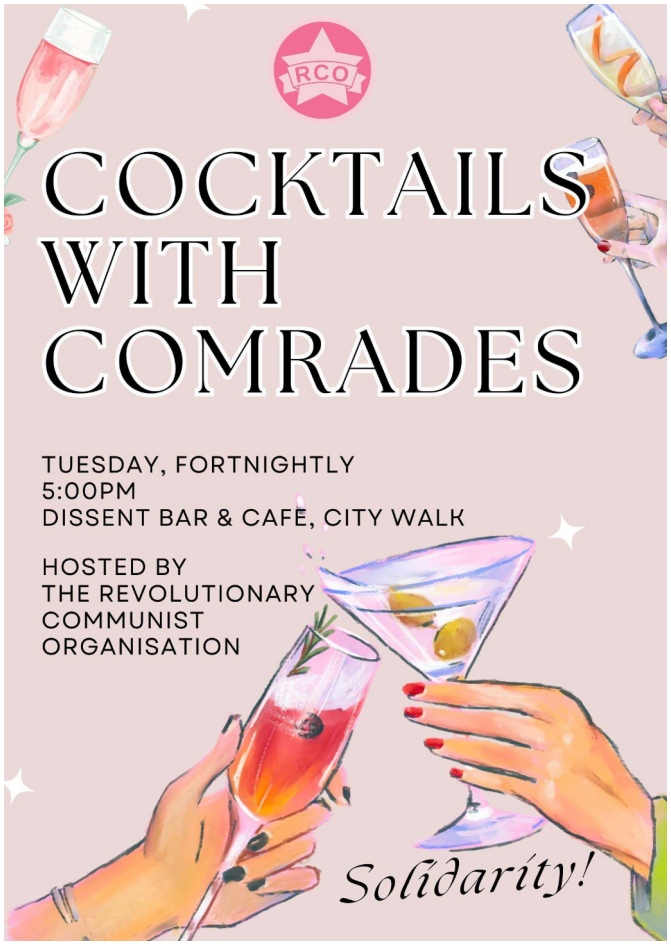

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NEWCASTLE

Letters

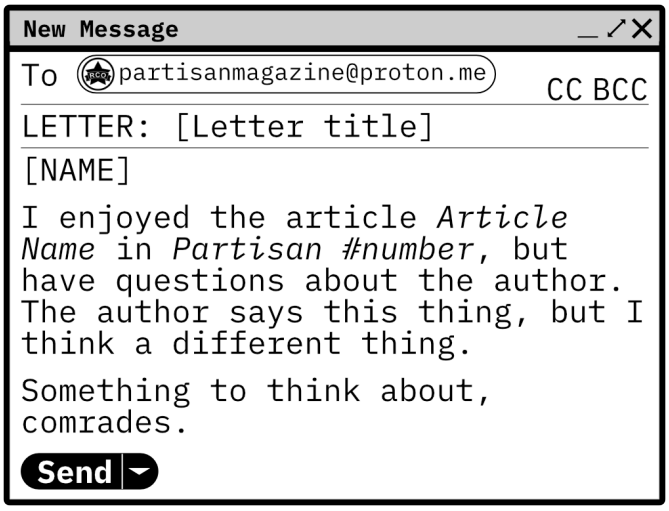
What does CARF want to be?
Anthony Furia, Melbourne

The Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF) meeting on Tuesday evening was an impressive gathering of the socialist left in Melbourne. Comrades from the RCO, ACF, Socialist Alliance, CPA, Red Ant, the SWC, VS, and, of course, Socialist Alternative were among those in attendance in an unexpected crowd of 120 odd people. Even more impressively, the atmosphere in the room was cooperative, focused, and open – always a feat when more than three sects find themselves in a meeting together.

The question CARF, and, by extension, Socialist Alternative (as the founders and driving force of CARF) must ask themselves now, in the face of an ascendant far-right movement and tentative interest from the socialist movement in Melbourne broadly, is what, precisely, they want to be. If CARF is to be successful in coordinating, leading, and mobilising as one a socialist strategy to destroy the NSN and their foray into 'mainstream' political society through a cross-class coalition of the far-right, it must make itself a democratic organisation. An organisation with clarified, comprehensive internal structures and life external to Socialist Alternative, with a life of its own and an existence and politics independent to any one sect. This path is not without risks, and, certainly, offers only tentative rewards for Socialist Alternative itself. Will the other sects be willing to cooperate? Can they accept being a strategic, principled minority within a broader organisation when it comes to coordinating interventions and actions for the movement? How would CARF even go about such a reorganisation, and what would be needed to begin it?

The alternative route is far easier and with less risk; maintain CARF as a virtual front for Socialist Alternative, blur organisational boundary lines, and use it to coordinate Socialist Alternative intervention into the Anti-Racist, anti-fascist movement. It should not come as a surprise to any sect if Socialist Alternative pursues this end, and can any (non-partyist) sect honestly say they would act differently were they the largest organisation on the Melbourne left? Despite this, Socialist Alternative is presented here with a critical opportunity. An opportunity to demonstrate their interest in not just building their organisation, but in contributing to the construction of something greater – of a socialist movement united in strategy against the fascist movement, and with clarified goals, aims, and tactics in mind. An opportunity to resist the repetition of 21st century socialist movements, to break new ground, conquer new territory, and step out bravely into the possibilities of a united socialist movement – if only in opposition to fascism.

Will Socialist Alternative take this opportunity? Probably not – and they won't be bereft of dozens of particulars, non-cooperative incidents, and flaws within the groups that CARF could strive to represent and coordinate to point to justify it. What is important is that the opportunity is here. The objective situation has called for unity, the goodwill and interest of the movement in a state of urgency is present, and CARF could be the very organisation through which these two conditions meet and are propelled forward. Whatever happens, whatever the sects determine as the correct response to the March for Australia rally on Sunday and our blundering response, what remains clear is the necessity of democratic unity – of coordinated strategy, and cooperation in going beyond mere response to fascist action and toward a proactive, positive program of engagement and prevention. ■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Something to think about, comrades.
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Defense of Spontaneity
Fox Luces, Fremantle

A response to comrade Volkova

Comrade Volkava's recent article in Partisan, The Marxist Brotherhood? The Egyptian Revolution and How the Arab Spring Failed is detailed, illuminating, incisive, and correct, and ought to be read widely for these reasons. Therefore, my belief that she falls prey to some moments of ideological tunnel-vision is not to be misconstrued, though I nonetheless feel compelled to express it, in some brief remarks.

In her analysis of the failure of Arab spring to achieve even genuine democracy (much less socialism), Volkova criticises the opportunistic commitment to 'spontaneity' expressed by Trotskyist socialists following Tony Cliff, manifested in the Egyptian context by the Socialist Revolutionaries (SR). I enclose spontaneity in scare-quotes quite deliberately, unlike Comrade Volkova, as the opportunism she describes has the precise effect of defusing and derailing the revolutionary spontaneity it claims all the time to be upholding. To demonstrate this, it is sufficient to keep to the facts referred to in the original article, though numerous other historical examples can be provided.

Volkova writes: "[In the Cliffite view] workers are assumed to already possess a disjointed form of revolutionary consciousness. All that is necessary is for socialists to build the confidence of the workers to articulate themselves, seize power, and implement their vision. Socialists must therefore avoid "talking down to the masses". "Meet them where they're at" is a common Cliffite phrase." The incoherence of this position should be immediately obvious. Despite an imagined theoretical commitment to the socialist potential in natural working-class attitudes (a potential which should not be dismissed, incidentally) ultimately the Cliffite socialists belie an utterly condescending view toward workers at the critical moment. To counsel socialists to avoid "talking down" to the masses, to "meet them where they're at" implies an intellectual position so enlightened and beyond the consciousness of the average worker that to speak openly about one's aims is inherently dangerous. I submit that this can in no way be accurately described as a commitment to spontaneity, rather the opposite - this is a deep fear of the true spontaneity that comes from a working class disillusioned about all distractions from its task, and enthralled in its own collective power.

To truly harness the spontaneity of the working class - which is a real, salient phenomenon, as both Arab Spring and recent events must attest - it is necessary for us socialists to put aside the tactical layer between communist and masses in favour of unpretentious agitation for the overthrow of the present nature of things. The great killer of spontaneous revolutionary moments is a hesitancy, a draw of breath before collapsing back into familiar structures of logic - whether that be the Shia Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood, or liberal democracy, as in the case of the recent wave of global protests being dubbed the "Asian spring". Therefore it misses the point to argue, as Volkova does, that what was missing in 2011 was a vanguard party. Were a vanguard party present, the task of that party would not have been just to defeat the forces of reaction and opportunism, but first to awaken the sense of self-potential latent within the working class, without which nothing meaningful can be achieved. The degeneration of revolutions naturally reflect themselves in the leadership structures of those revolutions, but true revolutions take place only when the leaders are accountable to the spontaneous power of the class-conscious people; the production of that consciousness is the primary task of any communist, for there is the locus of possibility. ■

"Our legislature is a farce. The representatives of the King outnumber the representatives of the people."

ʻAkilisi Pōhiva